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A STATESMAN'S MAINSPRING:
THE THOUGHT OF ADLAI EWING STEVENSON

by
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All politics is made up of many things -- economic pressures, personal ambitions, the desire to exercise power, the overriding issues of national need and aspiration. But if it is nothing more, it is without roots. It is built in shifting, changing sands of emotion and interest. When challenged, it can give no account of itself. When threatened, it is in danger of collapse.

--from: Adlai Ewing Stevenson, June 18, 1959
"The Political Relevance of Moral Principle"

PREFACE

I undertook this study for a number of reasons, some accidental, some profound within the limits of my not-so-profound intellect. The Profound Reasons, being more elegant, I would like to try to explain first. They are basically three:

1. I was spending the summer in a small ranch and farm town in the desert of eastern Oregon when I heard of Adlai Stevenson's death. I was struck by the lack of attention, not to mention grief, his death elicited. The untimeliness of his death and the intellectual isolation in which I found myself at the time have played a part in my choosing to study his thought.
2. I am convinced that theology spends a great deal too much time examining its navel--and although such examination is not without rewards, it just might be, I thought, that we of the Church could benefit from looking at some other things.
3. My conviction is that, as Bonhoeffer among many others has stated, "the preaching of the church is . . . necessarily 'political', i.e. it is directed at the order of politics in which man

is engaged."¹ This being so, and the casual study of politics and politicians being in the way of a hobby with me anyway, I thought that some theological thinking about a particular politician might well leaven my theological lump.

The Accidental Reasons for undertaking this study, as I warned, are not so elegant. They, too, are three in number, but their lack of elegance requires a non-enumerated format. The first is that I was unhappy with a previously chosen thesis topic. The next is that a good friend, Albert L. Mahan, shared with me a list of topics he had been going through in a similar state of near desperation, and that list contained the entry "The Religion of Adlai E. Stevenson". The last Accidental Reason was that I thought that the project would be fun, especially since I'm partial to the Democratic Party in its more liberal manifestations.

So I launched into my study with some zest and with rather grandiose visions. I thought that I might somehow produce something on the order of William J. Wolf's little masterpiece, now in the Presidential library in the White House, The Religion of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Seabury Press, 1963). Alas, Dear Reader, you have no such masterpiece in your hands. Instead you have something not unlike

¹D. Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 156.

my "straining at a gnat". The present study has brought me to the point at which I should have liked to have been able to begin, a point at which, indeed, I feel I have just begun to understand something of the "mainspring" of the thought of Adlai E. Stevenson. I hope that I can share with the reader this point of the beginning of understanding.

A word is in order concerning the title of this paper. It is adapted from the title of a speech as it is published in Stevenson's Putting First Things First (New York: Random House, 1960), "Our Broken Mainspring". The thesis of this speech is more clearly indicated by the title given it in another place of publication (where the text is apparently fuller)--"The Political Relevance of Moral Principle", in The Christian Register, Vol. CXXXVIII, March, 1959.

One note on notes in this paper: in the case of citations from books by Stevenson, the author's name has been omitted in the footnotes, except for the first mention of each of his books in the notes. This has been done for the convenience of the typist, and so that the reader's eye won't be assaulted with a maze of "Stevenson" at the bottom of the pages.

There are many acknowledgements in order, the first being a repetition of thanks to Bert Mahan for providing a spark for this study, and a very grateful nod to Dr. Owen C. Thomas, my thesis adviser, for his probing questions (when I would expose myself to them), his lack of apparent anxiety as to whether or not I would get the job done, and his

"non-directive" manner of direction. And I owe many debts for courtesy in correspondence and interviews, received from: the Rev. James Luther Adams, Harvard Divinity School; Norman Cousins, The Saturday Review, Inc.; Mrs. Denard of the Book Room at the Unitarian Universalist Association headquarters; Henry Hampton, Unitarian Universalist Association; the Rev. Martin D. Hardin, Jr., a first cousin of Mr. Stevenson; Maryline Poole Hutton, who put me in touch with Mr. Hardin; John Kenneth Galbraith, Harvard University School of Public Administration; the Rev. Richard Paul Graebel, Springfield, Illinois; the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn, Boston, Massachusetts; the Rev. William Lee Miller, Yale Divinity School; Edward Reed, Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Washington, D.C.; the Rev. Kenneth C. Walker, Bloomington, Illinois; the United States Mission to the United Nations. I hope all these will forgive any misinterpretations of them I might make. Special thanks also to my typist, Jane Turner. And finally, thanks to my wife, especially for her endurance while I wrote this paper.

Richard L. Ullman

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INTRODUCTION: A CHURCHMAN ASKS A STATESMAN

Perennial among the tensions within the Church is the relation of the faith to matters of State. The tension, with roots at least as far back as the Old Israel and Saul and Samuel, can be found between the various sources of the first books of the Old Testament, where a "Priestly" strand seems to approve a close, pious alliance between religion and the nation, while a "Prophetic" strand tends to see the faith as a standard of criticism of politics. E. Richard Niebuhr, in his Christ and Culture, has traced the various currents and eddies that the tension has created through Christian history. At the present time, the extremes might be thought of as being defined on the one hand by such a journal as Christianity Today, which constantly argues that the Church has only to do with spiritual things, and, on the other hand, by such books as Harvey Cox's The Secular City, which in some places argues that the Church has practically nothing to do with the spiritual realm.¹ The general problem represented by all this, then, is "how shall the Church relate itself to the affairs of the world?"

¹An example of this extremism is found in Harvey Cox, The Secular City (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p.253: "Theology today must be that of reflection-in-action by which the Church finds out what this politician-God is up to and moves in to work along with him. In the epoch of the secular city, politics replaces metaphysics as the language of theology." (Author's italics)

It is the author's feeling that this, as asked by Churchmen, is a very inward-looking sort of question. It represents a necessary effort of self-conscious probing into the mission of the Church--an effort that should never be relaxed. But there is another basic way of looking at the relation of the faith to matters of State: what does the Statesman say about the relationship? More, what in the utterances of Statesmen indicates a relationship between matters of faith and of politics, and what is the nature of the indicated relationship? This thesis is a particularization of this second general approach to the study of the relation of the faith and politics.

The particular Statesman is the late Adlai Ewing Stevenson (1900-1965), a Presidential administrative and diplomatic appointee in the New Deal and in World War II, a "founding father" of the United Nations, Governor of Illinois (1948-1953), twice Democratic nominee for President of the United States (1952 and 1956), and, from 1961 until his death in 1965, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations and member of the President's cabinet. The author has attempted to analyze the published books, speeches, and articles of Stevenson with the question of the relationship of the faith and politics in the forefront. The effort has been to uncover any coherent theological or philosophical basis in his thought, with the idea that this might be presented in such a way as to illumine the general question described above. The analysis and thoughts upon the primary

materials have been supplemented and to some extent guided by such interviews and correspondence as have been possible with associates of Stevenson, and by biographies and articles written about him and his work.

Originally, one of the chief purposes of the interviews was to determine the soundness of using Stevenson's books of speech collections as reliable expressions of his own, individual thought. This was considered important, for, as one of his associates (a former speech-writer) wrote after Stevenson's death: "it would be physically impossible for any man to write even a tiny fraction of the phenomenal number of speeches he delivered."² This same writer, however, asserts that "nobody put alien words into (Stevenson's) mouth. . . . Moreover, whenever he had time he did like to work on the speeches himself. . . ."³ And another associate and Stevenson speech-writer, John Kenneth Galbraith, told the author in an interview: "They're his thought, his speeches. He didn't always write all the speeches he gave--he couldn't; didn't have time. He never gave a speech he hadn't gone over. Everything in them was his."⁴ So this evidence gives assurance about the soundness of method employed in this paper. Further, there are some speeches and writings that are clearly of such a personal quality, or presented at such times, that they may be considered to represent Stevenson's most authentic

²John Fischer, "A Footnote on Adlai E. Stevenson", Harper's Magazine, CCXXXI, (November 1965), p. 20.

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴Interview with John Kenneth Galbraith, November 30, 1965.

utterances. These include such items as "This I Believe", his nomination acceptances and defeat concessions, the various eulogies upon the deaths of major public figures, his Harvard Godkin Lectures of 1954 (published under the title Call to Greatness), his "report" on his 1958 trip to Russia (published as Friends and Enemies), and speeches made while he was holding no official, heavy public responsibilities. So there is a wealth of material available to give clues to the workings of Stevenson's mind and heart--material raising no substantial questions of "authenticity".

After analysis of the primary materials, the study proceeds to a brief assessment of the context of Stevenson's thinkings--contemporarily, in his personal history, and in the thought of some figures in American history. Finally, there are the author's concluding thoughts on how this analysis illumines the general issue of which this thesis is a particular study.

In summary, then, the effort of this study is not primarily one of inward-looking analysis but rather of uncovering an extra-ecclesiastical view of an issue traditionally kept within the walls of the Church. The method of uncovering this extra-ecclesiastical view is that of trying to discover the religious or theological "mainspring" of the thought of one outstanding Statesman, Adlai Ewing Stevenson.

CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM OF UNCOVERING STEVENSON'S RELIGION

Reticence, Loyalty, and Unsophistication.

Reticence was surely the public face of the religion of Adlai Ewing Stevenson; his personal religious convictions were not in any way on parade before the world. Indeed, his religious convictions were not clear even to many of his associates and friends, although most testify to a certain loyalty of Governor Stevenson to the regular worship of the church. This was a long-standing loyalty, reaching back to a devout mother, whose own grandfather, Jesse Fell, had been, as well as a politician and friend of Abraham Lincoln, one of the founders of the Unitarian Church in Stevenson's hometown, and, on his father's side, to several Presbyterian clergymen. In Stevenson's childhood, his sister reports, "religion was never a duty, or church a mere ritual . . . Faith in God was as natural as loving Nature. Father . . . often went with us to Mother's church, the Unitarian, where Adlai and I went to Sunday school. One of our earliest memories is this little brick church. . . ."¹ The childhood habit continued in later years, and it is reported that, as Governor

¹E.S. Ives and H. Dolson, My Brother Adlai (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1952), p. 51.

of Illinois, "Stevenson regularly attended Sunday service" at the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois, his capital city.²

This loyalty to the worshipping community was shown to be a matter of some depth, causing a personal crisis in Stevenson's life in 1955. At that time he was living in Libertyville, Illinois, some distance from his law offices in Chicago, from his former setting of Springfield, and from his hometown of Bloomington. He had been through several hectic years of activity, during which he had met with several major disappointments: the failure of his marriage in 1949, when his wife divorced him because of her unwillingness to be subjected to the life of First Lady of Illinois; the defeat for the Presidency in 1952; and in 1953 the end of his service as Governor, which he had wanted to be able to continue. After the 1953 retirement from public office, he was still busy, trying to exercise leadership from the position of "titular head" of the Democratic Party, preparing the Harvard University Godkin Lectures of 1954 after a tour of the world, and participating in the Congressional election campaigns of 1954. But by 1955, his life had quieted down considerably, and he found himself often alone on his gentleman farmer's estate in Libertyville, even his sons gone, away at school.

²R.E. Chapin, "Ten Ministers: A History of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois 1828-1953," p.66, quoted in R.P. Graebel, Adlai and You and I (Springfield, Illinois: By the First Presbyterian Church, 1965), p. 7.

It was in this context that Stevenson especially felt the need of the church.³ He had in Libertyville no ties with any congregation, and in his isolation he brooded about death, as he told a close friend, a Unitarian minister. He thought of dying alone with nobody to know what to do, because he had no tie with a Church congregation. So, in October 1955, he was baptized and brought into communicant membership of the nearby First Presbyterian Church of Lake Forest, Illinois. It was not until the middle of December 1955⁴ that news of his new church affiliation broke out, somewhat to Stevenson's dismay. He was afraid that news of his switch of affiliation would be interpreted as a move to curry favor with Presbyterian voters and others who might have been offended by his Unitarianism. He also did not want to appear in any way disloyal to his strong family tradition of Unitarianism, nor did he want his religion to become a tasteless public display, as he conceived Dwight D. Eisenhower's religion to have become. And so he called on clergy friends of his to help him, which they did in the following statement, released to the press:

"We understand perfectly that you [Stevenson] have found a local church home [Presbyterian] without forsaking a life-long commitment [Unitarian]."⁵

³Interview with the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn, Unitarian Minister, Boston, Massachusetts, February 15, 1966. Unless otherwise noted, the facts following are from this interview, as are descriptions of Stevenson's state of mind.

⁴Cf. "The New Presbyterian", Newsweek, XLVI, December 12, 1955, pp. 35-36.

⁵"Mr. Stevenson Joins Presbyterian Church", Christian Century, LXXII, December 21, 1955, p. 1483.

This statement, signed by two Unitarian clergymen and two Presbyterian clergymen, was apparently well received by the press, and the only major comment of judgment on the whole matter, appearing in the Christian Century, was favorable: "We trust that Mr. Stevenson will find all the spiritual help he has sought in his new church fellowship, and we are confident that church and public will respect the reticence with which he has surrounded his act."⁶

The incident of Stevenson's change of church affiliation is important to our study because, on close examination, it demonstrates three primary characteristics of his religion. The first characteristic is that public reticence which was the opening assertion of this chapter. The change was made in as much privacy as possible, and that the privacy was intended is evident from the fact that four clergymen, all of them at that time residents of Illinois and in some degree of intimacy with Mr. Stevenson, were recruited to "put a lid" on the story as soon as it received national exposure. The second characteristic revealed in the story behind the public report, as reported by one intimate to it, is the deep level of personal meaning that Stevenson attached to his church membership. This membership and his loyalty of attendance were not simply matters of ingrained habit--the community itself served to strengthen Stevenson, to relieve the isolation that bore down upon his sensitive personality even at a time apparently lacking in any pressure.

⁶Ibid.

His church attendance was not, as he suspected of his chief political opponent Eisenhower, a matter of public show or of politics; it was an assertion of his own deep need for community. As will be shown later, there can be seen a coherence between this personal need and some of Stevenson's basic public policy presuppositions. The last characteristic of Stevenson's religion to be found in the incident of his change to the Presbyterian Church is one which is not as explicit in the situation as the other two, namely, a certain quality of naivete. There are, of course, important theological differences between the Unitarian Church and the Presbyterian Church. These, apparently, were not one of his concerns as Stevenson joined himself to this local congregation. A summary comment of this aspect of this incident was made by one of the four clergy signators of the public statement of understanding: "Well, this was the kind of unsophisticated person he really was, you know."⁷

Views of Friends and Associates.

The views of Stevenson's friends and associates about his religion cover a wide range, and sometimes one can find in these views more of the commentators and their loyalties than one can find of Stevenson. Perhaps at one extreme are

⁷Interview with the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn, February 15, 1966. I would not want the reader to misunderstand this comment. Neither Mr. Mendelsohn nor I would agree that Stevenson was a generally naive or unsophisticated person. The naivete and lack of sophistication here are theological and nothing more.

the comments of economist and former Ambassador to India John Kenneth Galbraith, a key adviser and speech writer for Stevenson in both 1952 and 1956 and in the years of "titular leadership" of the Democratic Party. Galbraith's off-hand reaction to an inquiry about Stevenson's religion was clear and categorical:

"He was ritualistic in his religion. He went to church regularly. It was part of the normal routine, a feature of life; he was sort of an aristocrat, and it was the thing to do. He was not deeply religious."⁸

Any explicit religious language in Stevenson's speeches Galbraith is willing to dismiss as rhetoric--not a cynical rhetoric, but rhetoric that served in place of thought.

"When he didn't quite know what to say, he said things like that", asserted Galbraith, upon having read to him a portion of a Stevenson speech dealing with "a spiritual hunger in the world today".⁹ This sort of view of Stevenson's religion represents a serious challenge to even the possibility of carrying out such a study as the present one, and it is therefore a view which the reader should bear in mind. The author does not feel that Stevenson's religion consisted primarily in habit, formalism, or rhetoric, and so the Galbraith view has been rejected. The reader will doubtless judge later whether or not this rejection of Galbraith's judgment was wise.

⁸Interview with Galbraith, November 30, 1965.

⁹Ibid.

A view on Stevenson's religion similar to Galbraith's is held by the latter's former colleague at Harvard University and in the Kennedy Administration, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., another close adviser and important Stevenson speech writer. Writing in response to a letter of the author's, Schlesinger doubted "how far a 'theological analysis' of Governor Stevenson's thought would be valid. While he had a profound sense of the frailty of human striving, it always seemed to me to be cast in stoic rather than religious terms."¹⁰ In a telephone conversation, Schlesinger expanded on this point, observing that in any case he did not think that Stevenson was articulate about his religion, and asserting that politicians in general are less concerned with philosophy than with action.¹¹ Although Schlesinger's angle of approach and his apparent attitude toward theology and philosophy are different from Galbraith's, the effect of both men's observations are roughly equivalent--that is, to cast doubt upon the likelihood of finding any meaningful kind of theological foundation underlying Stevenson's statesmanship.

Another source in the academic community, also a campaign aide and writer for Adlai Stevenson, Associate Professor of Social Ethics William Lee Miller of Yale Divinity School, also agrees with Mendelsohn and Schlesinger that

¹⁰Letter from Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Washington, D.C., November 27, 1965.

¹¹Telephone conversation with Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Washington, D.C., December 20, 1965.

Stevenson was not theologically articulate; he agrees with Galbraith on the point about rhetoric that, as far as theological or religious language goes, there was with Stevenson a "semi-literary, high-toned business" that "cut across all religious categories."¹² Miller told a story that illuminates Stevenson's lack of theological sophistication. In the "one 'theological' conversation" he had with Stevenson, that the latter "said he liked liberal clergymen. When I asked him what he meant, it turned out he meant politically and not theologically liberal--he said, 'for instance, Harry Emerson Fosdick and Reinhold Niebuhr'."¹³ The point here is that Fosdick and Niebuhr represent radically differing philosophical and theological viewpoints, although they clearly can be said to represent the same area of the political spectrum. It was the latter thing that mattered in Stevenson's judgment; theological categories were irrelevant to him (at least in this instance) in the face of what he must have seen as more basic issues. This is not dissimilar to his lack of perception of the incompatibility of Unitarian Church membership with Presbyterian (trinitarian) Church membership. Here, again, is a matter to which this study must return--but at a later point.

The general impression, then, of those whose contacts with Stevenson were primarily political, seems to be that

¹²Telephone conversation with William Lee Miller, New Haven, Connecticut, January 21, 1966.

¹³Ibid. See also W.L. Miller, "Adlai Stevenson: A Way of Gallantry", Presbyterian Life, XVII, August 15, 1965, p. 18.

his religion was a peripheral interest at most, primarily a matter of style. He was not, by these men's lights, a "religious" man.

Among those whose contacts with Stevenson were not primarily political ones, there is a more mixed response. There is, in the first place, an element of mystification among some about Stevenson's religion. So his first cousin, Martin D. Hardin, Jr., a Presbyterian clergyman, writes that "Adlai's background was both Unitarian and Presbyterian, and . . . somehow (I've never been quite sure how) he managed to establish and maintain a formal membership in both religious groups. . . . He was also faithful in worship in both of his churches." But Hardin goes on to say that "Adlai must have had a deep and profound religious faith of his own",¹⁴ even if it did not fit into more conventional molds.

A step closer in intimacy with Stevenson than Hardin was Richard P. Graebel, Stevenson's Presbyterian pastor in Springfield, Illinois. In a very eulogistic sermon, Graebel styles Stevenson a religious and spiritual man, a man of "inspiration and radiance of . . . life".¹⁵ Yet this evaluation of Stevenson's religion is less fulsome than that of Kenneth C. Walker, the Minister Emeritus of the Unitarian Church in Bloomington, Illinois, the church of which Stevenson's maternal grandfather was a co-founder. Walker states

¹⁴Letter from Martin D. Hardin, Jr., Buffalo, N.Y., November 21, 1965.

¹⁵Graebel, op. cit., p. 9.

that Stevenson's "life represented a remarkable parallel to that of the 8th century B.C. Hebrew prophets."¹⁶

So reaction to Stevenson on the score of his religion runs a wide gamut. To some, he is uncreative, conventional, aristocratic, unthinking in his religious life. To others, he is religiously inarticulate. Finally, to a third kind of observer, he is a veritable prophet, a religious and spiritual man par excellence. The incident over Stevenson's church membership in 1955 can be read to satisfy any of these interpretations, but it might better be read, as has been suggested, as revealing more or less external characteristics of his religion rather than internal qualities. These external characteristics--public reticence about religion, personal loyalty to the church as a worshipping community, and a certain naivete about theological niceties--seem only to inhibit access to Stevenson's religious thought, to make him rather an enigma religiously, or to cause one to dismiss as unimportant to Stevenson any religious dimension. In short, the route of testimony by intimates or of observation of externals is closed to the student of Stevenson's religious thought. If the student is not to give up his study, he must then turn to an analysis of the printed word, fortified with the knowledge that the external characteristics, that is to say, the public face of Stevenson's religion will always tend to hide its internal qualities.

¹⁶Letter from Kenneth C. Walker, Bloomington, Illinois, February 7, 1966.

Evidence from Stevenson's First 50 Years.

There is a delightful documentary phonograph recording of an interview with Stevenson that was done in June 1956. The conversation ranged over a great many subjects, and the listener begins to get a feeling for Stevenson, especially a sense of his reticence, which includes a certain quality of humility coupled with a sense of duty and high calling through his personal and family history. These are characteristics that have been commented upon at some length by Stevenson biographers¹⁷ and even analyzed briefly by one author in a work on the "Protestant Establishment".¹⁸ In the recorded interview, Stevenson is reminded of his speech to the senior class at Princeton in 1954, when he said that "what a man knows at fifty that he did not know at twenty is, for the most part, incommunicable."¹⁹ When pressed to try to communicate this "incommunicable" wisdom, the burden of his response was in these words: "the belief in some transcendental power which I think comes to our rescue in times of need . . . ; areas opened to us of spiritual depth, of perception, of understanding, reliance, that we can't

¹⁷See especially K.S. Davis, A Prophet in His Own Country (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1957), Chapter 2, "History as a Family Matter".

¹⁸See Stevenson references in E.D. Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America (New York: Random House, 1964).

¹⁹A.E. Stevenson, What I Think (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 174.

have until you have, well, earned it. Perhaps that's it."²⁰ He went on to speak of the "need for faith and respect and confidence in institutions" and then of the need for "genuine religious faith". Finally, the interviewer asked him to comment upon the words of Matthew 6:33, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Stevenson's response was to say that "only as we have spirituality as an ally can we in the long run survive at all. We must find the kingdom of God on earth before we can make this a better kingdom." He then quoted lines of Edwin Markham: "We men of earth have here the stuff of paradise . . . Ours the stuff sublime to build eternity in time."²¹

In this informal conversation, there is a strange combination of vagueness and specificity, of, on the one hand, foggy language that seems possibly to mask uncertainty and, on the other hand concrete language of great conviction. So, on this evidence, one can say that Stevenson believed in a very vague sort of god--"some transcendental power"--that acts in a very concrete and indeed personal way--"rescue in times of need". An undefined "spirituality" is required for the very real and specific achievement of survival. And again, the "kingdom of God" as a spiritual concept seems to have no content for Stevenson; he turns

²⁰Portrait of Adlai Stevenson: In Conversation with Arnold Michaelis (Produced by Arnold Michaelis; Spoken Arts 770), side 2.

²¹Ibid.

instead to the words of a western American poet of social protest to affirm the value of concrete human achievement. It seems that Stevenson in this conversation was not able-- or at least willing--to sustain discourse in theological terms; although he intimates that he has had religious experiences, these seem to have been deeply private matters for which he does not have language for expression. The importance of this evidence for the present study is that it indicates a lack of ease with theological discourse; so when one deals with Stevenson's explicit attempts to articulate his faith, the indication is that one is dealing with the efforts of an amateur in "theology"--even, one might better say, a stranger to whom the language in which he is trying to speak is a foreign tongue.

Among the earliest documentary evidence about Stevenson's religion is a tantalizing snatch from a letter to his family written in 1918, during his second year at the Choate School. Here he writes: "I am afraid I'll make a fool of myself trying to tell the school about religion. This morning, Harry Stearns and I led the whole school to church."²² These are, to be sure, the words of an adolescent, recently come from the warmth and protection and pastoral of a fairly aristocratic home on the Illinois prairie into what must have been the relatively cold, challenging, and perhaps cynical environment of a high-pressured New England boarding school. But there is a certain pleasant straightforwardness and

²²Quoted in Ives and Dolson, op. cit., p. 109.

winning naivete in his view of himself as a sort of missionary, bringing religion, light and truth, to these soot-fing people. The lines indicate an early certainty about the value of religious exercises.

There is further evidence that this earnestness was well received on the home front, indeed, that it was quite specifically encouraged by Stevenson's mother. She seemed to have been in the habit of writing him quite philosophical advice on life, even in Stevenson's young manhood, after he had served as a land-locked sailor in World War I and had completed his undergraduate work at Princeton. Her advice and exhortations were apparently quite heavy-handed, bordering even on the mawkish, and it is instructive to read extracts from a quite lengthy letter of this type, written to Stevenson in his second year at the Harvard Law School in 1923:

. . . I believe God wants His children to be happy. . . .
 [If] we are fortified with optimism, good health, and faith, we can meet these demonstrations [of people's lack of respect for our religious convictions] and go unscathed rejoicing. . . . After all, it is true beauty, greatness, we are after and you must not confuse falsehood with truth. You must not worship the shadow for the substance. "Having eyes, see." . . . "Know thyself." Know the world, know values, know what you want--above all, know God, universal Good. Stand for that, whatever befalls. . . . Remember that I know you couldn't be so happy and grateful if you were not trusting God and so consider how happy you are making me.²³

One wishes to know what was the concrete issue in response to which his mother wrote Stevenson this advice; it would be helpful to be able to read his letter that had elicited this

²³Ibid... p. 176.

spiritual support. Still, the passage is helpful in the effort to understand Stevenson's thought, for it will be seen that some of the characteristics of his mother's religious thought crop up in later years in Stevenson's thought. It is not assuming too much to say that this motherly advice was deeply influential in Stevenson's development, especially when his repeated quip about his origins is remembered: "as I grew up. . . , I found myself in Mother's beloved Unitarian Church and Father's beloved Democratic Party. I guess I was a compromise to begin with, which may have predestined a political career for which I had no conscious stomach. . . ." ²⁴

The earliest evidence of Stevenson's religious thought in his maturity are his editorials in 1925 during the Scopes trial, at which time Stevenson was managing editor of a family-owned newspaper, the Bloomington Pantagraph. Stevenson had an emotional attachment to the prosecuting attorney, William Jennings Bryan, who was the man with whom his grandfather and namesake was in 1900 Vice-Presidential running mate. But Bryan was representing the fundamentalist, reactionary view of religion and its relation to the State in the historic Scopes trial, in which the issues involved the right of a science teacher to expose his students to the presumed

²⁴Stevenson, Major Campaign Speeches, 1952 (New York: Random House, 1952), p. xvi. It is interesting that in 1959, in his A. Powell Davies Memorial Lecture, after his 1955 joining of the Presbyterian Church, Stevenson so alters this story that his stance is ambiguous about his Unitarianism (Stevenson, "The Political Relevance of Moral Principle", The Christian Register, CXXXVIII (March 1959), p. 9).

anti-Biblical teachings of Darwin's theory of evolution. Stevenson's sister reports that he was "a little saddened by Bryan in his old age and his extreme fundamentalist views. Adlai's editorials left no doubt that Bryan or no Bryan, he was against religious bigotry and censorship through ignorance."²⁵ Another Stevenson biographer says that the future Ambassador's Scopes trial editorials were "sober defenses of the principles which Bryan and the Fundamentalists party attacked: free inquiry, free speech, the separation of church and state."²⁶

Almost twenty-five years later when Stevenson, then Governor of Illinois, was called upon to speak at the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Unitarian Church of Bloomington, Illinois, his liberal religious views of Scopes trial days were again underlined as he spoke in support of the traditions of that church. The founding document of that congregation, drawn up in 1861 and subscribed by Stevenson's great-grandfather Jesse Fell, spoke of "the right and duty of private judgement in all matters . . . and . . . freedom of inquiry, conducted in an honest and reverent spirit, rather than through fixed standards of belief. . . ."²⁷ Identifying himself fully with this past, Stevenson exhorted

²⁵Ives and Dolson, op. cit., p. 182. Unfortunately, the author has not been able to read the Stevenson Scopes trial editorials because of time and cost considerations, as they are not readily available to the public.

²⁶Davis, op. cit., p. 151.

²⁷Free Congregational Society of Bloomington, Illinois, "Declaration of Views: Preamble". (Typewritten).

his listeners to "be sure, then, that we Unitarians understand our proper role. Liberalism is our way of life." Then, in a manner than was to become familiar as well as politically costly in 1952, he warned that "it is not impossible for a slow seepage of doctrinaire backwash to gather around the principles of liberal religion," and he deplored "the common hysterical mistake of so many movements . . . that the good in something will be lost unless it is swallowed like a pill, whole and at once, with no questions asked. It is my own feeling that the unbending apparatus we have built about wholesale competitive indoctrination contributes much to discord and strife in human affairs." He then concluded the address by quoting St. Paul at Galatians 5:1 : "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled with the yoke of bondage."²⁸

This is indeed an interesting speech, and, as shall be seen in Chapter II, it contains basic elements of a major Stevenson declaration of his beliefs.²⁹ There is little doubt that the highest order value in this speech is personal, intellectual freedom. A major theological question about this value, however, can be raised: does it follow as a corollary from the Pauline theology of freedom, or is Stevenson's citation of Paul at this point more a rhetorical

²⁸Stevenson, "Unitarianism." (Extracted from an unpublished address at the 90th Anniversary of the Unitarian Church of Bloomington, Illinois. Sunday, October 30, 1949.) (Typewritten).

²⁹I.e., "This I Believe", recorded for the Columbia Broadcasting System on May 21, 1954 and published in What I Think, pp. 151-2.

flourish? Certainly it must be said that it is possible to derive "personal, intellectual freedom" as a high order value from Paul's doctrine of the work of Christ in setting men free, and surely Paul in his own context was battling those proponents of that to which might be applied the Stevensonian phrase "doctrinaire backwash". But there is no evidence in this speech that Stevenson's thought about non-doctrinaire liberalism derives for him from a meditation on Paul's teaching about the freedom Christ in his death and resurrection has bestowed on man. Instead, Galatians 5:1 appears here apparently out of its context of the controversy of the Apostle with those who wished to impose legalistic strictures upon the Church and especially its members who had not previously been Jews. Yet there is another sense in which Galatians 5:1 is used "in context", for Stevenson was in fact recalling his hearers to their heritage of free inquiry, thereby imputing to them at least an element of faithlessness toward that which they had first been taught and had believed. And this is precisely the context of Paul's letter to the Galatians, where the Apostle begins in anger with the words, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel--not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ."³⁰ This is similar, albeit more emotional, in the pattern of its thought to

³⁰Galatians 1:6-7 (RSV).

Stevenson's condemnation of the apparatus of "competitive indoctrination", and Galatians 5:1 stands as the conclusion to Paul's train of thought as it does to Stevenson's. Nevertheless, the final distinction remains that Paul's thought is entirely centered on Christ and His work, whereas Stevenson's thought in this speech shows no tendencies in this direction at all. It would, therefore, not be appropriate at this point to make much of theological significance in Stevenson's use of a most profoundly Christian phrase.

Conclusions.

The evidence thus far indicates a man whose religion has, as it were, grown naturally, under the influence of strong family traditions and of a mother who freely and unashamedly pressed her son toward trust in God as universal father and universal good. The primary religious virtues center about what Stevenson calls "liberalism", which involves abhorrence of "competitive indoctrination" and affirmation of the value of free inquiry. Further, this religion has to do with the here and now--institutions, the kingdom of God on earth. This religion, by and large, lacks traditional Christian formulations; in particular, although it in some respects parallels the movement of the thought of the Apostle Paul in affirming freedom as over against a traditionalist dogmatism, it apparently lacks the central Pauline awareness of Christ as the unique agent of God for man's freedom.

Although Stevenson's religion is a basically optimistic one, there are in it elements dealing with the darker side of life. In times of need, a transcendental power "comes to our rescue". One wonders if Stevenson meant by this some sort of deus ex machina, which would seem to be inconsistent with his basically liberal and intellectual views. The answer to this might be seen in Stevenson's loyalty to the worshipping community, which served as his "rescue" in a "time of need" in which he was experiencing that extreme personal isolation that surrounds every man's contemplation of death. This seeking of community, whether or not it was in fact for Stevenson the means of his rescue by the "transcendental power", nevertheless was one of the elements of his religion that apparently had great meaning for him. And the orientation toward community might also be seen as part of his affirmation of his family history, which, especially in the person of Jesse Fell, contained the roots of his liberal religion.

At this point one may observe that the pattern of Stevenson's religion, under its aspect of his relation to a worshipping community, is a common religious pattern, and one central to Biblical religion. The religion of the people of both the Old and the New Testaments is nothing if not historical; the Old Israel worshipped the God of their fathers, the New Israel of the Church is likewise familial--the Household of God--centered on the Christ, the historical Jesus of Nazareth, son of David. In both the Old and the New

Testaments, the individual is defined by his relationship to the worshipping community; an example of this is in Psalm 27, to which there will be cause in Chapter II to return. This psalm is a combination of a "Song of Trust" and a "Lament", ending in a solemn "Oracle of Assurance". In its first section, the worshipper declares, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple."³¹ The point is that the center of meaning of the worshipper's life is discovered in the worshipping community, "in the house of the Lord". It is in this context that the worshipper then proceeds in Psalm 27 to enter his complaint, his lament; and it is still within the context of the community's worship that the individual receives, finally, strength and aid through words pronounced by a minister of the cult in a solemn oracle: "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord."³²

It should be noted that, in the sort of Biblical religion represented by Psalm 27, theological sophistication was not a hallmark. This, too, is another characteristic of Stevenson's religion. It is improper, however, especially at this point, to press further than its statement the simple analogy between certain elements of Biblical religion and certain elements of Stevenson's religion. What need to be

³¹Psalm 27.4 (AV).

³²Psalm 27.14 (AV).

noted now are these characteristics: his lack of theological definition and sophistication, the lack of undisputably Christian elements of doctrine, an emphasis upon free inquiry, the strong dependence upon community, and a certain naturalness of growth into religious thought and practice.

CHAPTER II: EXPLICIT PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON RELIGION

In the Time of Political Leadership.

Any nominee for the Presidency of the United States in this age is submitted to a barrage of publicity, examination, and cross-examination. Adlai Ewing Stevenson was no exception to this general rule, and so the public record of interviews with him on every topic from Alaska to Zoology is quite full. Inevitably, the question of the candidate's religious concerns is covered in various ways, but there is one specific location of very special interest. Episcopal Churchnews, the denominational magazine of the Episcopal Church in 1952, asked both Adlai Stevenson and his principal opponent, Dwight Eisenhower, to "prepare statements on how and the extent to which their religious faith would manifest itself should they be elected to the presidency."¹ Although Eisenhower responded only with excerpts on religion from his speeches, Stevenson prepared a full statement as requested. It is to this statement that attention is now directed.

The statement, as might be expected, is characterized by great reserve; Stevenson found that the magazine's question "is not an easy [one] to answer", and he "believed a man's

¹"Statement by the Editors," Episcopal Churchnews, CXX, September 21, 1952, p. 23.

personal religious beliefs had no proper place in our political life, except as they may influence his public acts. . . ."² Here, in fact, is more than simple reserve or reticence: it is a basic statement about the place of religion in statecraft. As such, it might be seen as the statesman's-eye view of the social ethics teaching of the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer on the matter of "Statecraft", namely, "that from its origin [*i.e.*, as perceived by the man of faith, "from Christ"] there is inherent in every thing its own law of being," and, in the case of the state and statesman, "no statesman can disregard any one of these laws and conventions with impunity."³ What a statesman does, under this teaching, is right insofar as it is "pertinent", that is, coherent with, these "laws and conventions". It follows that, strictly speaking, a man's personal religious beliefs have nothing to do with his ability to operate thus pertinently. This, then, is a theological justification for Stevenson's judgment about the relation of his personal religion to politics.

Stevenson's statement moves on from this disclaimer to two other observations about religious faith: that "the Christian faith has been the most significant single element

²Stevenson, "The Faith of the Candidates", Episcopal Churchnews, *ibid.* (*Italics mine*).

³D. Bonhoeffer, Ethics (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 236-37.

in our history and tradition" and that "religious faith remains . . . our greatest natural resource."⁴ The first of these assertions is a rather commonplace historical one, and the second may be brushed aside as a politic statement to make in a denominational magazine. But what follows is not so quickly dismissed, for he then reaches the heart of his statement, his belief that "there is a Creator who has given us life and the capacity and obligation to distinguish good from evil, to serve the good and oppose the evil."⁵ This is a very simple and straightforward view, an assertion of the centrality of the obligation for moral discrimination. There is no sophisticated theological derivation of this obligation or of its centrality: it is simply given, apparently, in the fact of creation. The modern theologian's tendency is to strive to derive from the Biblical creation stories an ethic based on the goodness of God's work and the implications of this for man's joyful, thankful obedience to God's will. Stevenson's words here do not seem to bear the marks of his having made such an analysis of man's situation in relation to his Creator. His ethics here are rather an ethics of duty, derived from the structure of things as he believes that structure to be.

Ethics, then, is at the heart of that part of his religion that Stevenson was willing to reveal in this 1952 statement. He expands on this, talking of how in government

⁴Stevenson, loc. cit.

⁵Ibid.

"it is incumbent upon us . . . to serve righteousness" and to take risks to this end.⁶ It is in the light of this that Stevenson then stated that religion protects the nation from "the blight of moral relativism" and provides our "stability for the present and our confidence for the future."⁷

Even though ethics was the central concern of this basic public statement of his religion, Stevenson did expose to public view two other elements of his religion. The one is an awareness of his own limitations, in the face of which "I should be utterly dependent on the sustaining power of God as the source of truth and of wisdom. . . ."⁸ Here is at least an echo of elements of his religion that were introduced in Chapter I: the "transcendental power" that rescues in times of need, and the influence of his mother's association of God with truth, with "know thyself", and with "universal Good". The second element exposed is rather more elusive, for it is a simple personal confession: "in my public

⁶Ibid. These ideas take on a certain irony in light of later developments in the Presidential campaign. Eisenhower proclaimed in righteous tones that the Republicans were on a great "Crusade". On the other hand, Eisenhower appeared, in the view of many observers, to have sold out the Crusade on the issue of the demagoguery of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, by refusing to disown him and his tactics or to stand up to him in any way. (See E.J. Hughes, The Ordeal of Power: A Political Memoir of the Eisenhower Years (New York: Atheneum, 1963), especially chapter 2)

⁷Stevenson, op. cit., pp. 23 and 36.

⁸Ibid., p. 36.

life I have always tried to follow the rule laid down 2500 years ago by the Prophet Micah: 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with my God'."⁹ Perhaps the most that can be said at this point about this confession is that Stevenson was impressed and moved by the exhortation of Micah. A further overall observation can be made, however, and that is that there is nothing in the statement in Episcopal Churchnews that would definitely classify Stevenson as a Christian--indeed, there is nothing in the statement that would compel anyone to consider him to be any more than a very ethical theist.

A second major explicit Stevenson statement of belief was produced in 1954 as part of a series of similar statements by many public figures, done under the leadership of Columbia Broadcasting System newsman and commentator, Edward R. Murrow. The statement, made under the series title of "This I Believe", is interesting if for no other than reasons of historical literary criticism, for it represents a conflation and expansion of two sources already encountered in this study: the 1949 speech at the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Unitarian Church of Bloomington, and the 1952 Episcopal Churchnews statement. A third element of Stevenson's "This I Believe" is from Psalm 27, which Stevenson's Presbyterian pastor in his time as Governor of Illinois claims to have introduced to Stevenson.¹⁰

⁹Ibid. (The Biblical quotation is from Micah 6:8 (AV).)

¹⁰Graebel, Adlai and You and I, p. 9.

He begins, again, with reserve, observing that "religious experience is highly intimate and, for me, at least, ready words are not at hand."¹¹ He then expresses three basic religious experiences: first of the magnitude of the universe, second of the ruling of all by law, and third of "the infinite wisdom that envelopes and embraces me and from which I take direction, purpose, and strength." All this he finds summed up in the words of Psalm 27, which expresses for him his belief in God's "goodness in the land of the living" and the experience of finding "no rocks of certainty or safety but His."¹²

The use of Psalm 27 is quite interesting, for it is very much tied up with the experience of a worshipping community, both in its original use and in Stevenson's experience, in which he read it before a congregation as the Old Testament lesson in a worship service.¹³ Yet the psalm lends itself to a highly personal, individualistic interpretation, as if said by one who had been completely caught in powerlessness and had begged God for help--and had received it. It is impossible to know if this pattern of powerlessness, begging God for help, and experiencing relief from helplessness was one Stevenson experienced with any frequency--or at all. But there are some signs that the pattern may have occurred often enough in his life to have been significant for him: he makes general assertions to this effect, for example, in the

¹¹What I Think, p. 151.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Graebel, loc. cit.

phonographically recorded interview discussed in Chapter I and in his "This I Believe" statement where he talks of taking strength from the "infinite wisdom". In addition, there stands the 1955 experience of isolation in the contemplation of death, and there were at least two other life crises that might have brought forth the response of helplessness, prayer, and comfort: his divorce in 1949, and an accidental shooting when Stevenson was thirteen years old, in which he killed his fifteen-year-old cousin, Ruth Mary Merwin.¹⁴ Certainly, all of these experiences, as well as the general one common to his generation of being participants in two world wars and the Great Depression, were experiences of the fragility of life and its relationships. It is therefore not dangerously speculative to conclude that Stevenson meant what he said about Psalm 27 and its deep personal meaning for him, although it would be too much on this basis to tag him as a "man of prayer".¹⁵

Stevenson's thought in "This I Believe" moves from his statement of personal religious experience in terms of

¹⁴The shooting incident is treated in all the major Stevenson biographies. See, for example, Alden Whitman and The New York Times, Portrait: Adlai E. Stevenson: Politician, Diplomat, Friend (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), pp.15-16.

¹⁵The author wishes to avoid making too great claims about the "subjective side" of Stevenson's religion, for reasons already explained in relation to interviews he has had with Stevenson associates and for reasons having to do with what has been styled here as Stevenson's reticence or reserve and his general theological unsophistication. Nevertheless, the reader may be mindful that there were very few clues to the deep, subjective spirituality of another recent statesman and sometime friend of Stevenson's, Dag Hammarskjöld, the author of a remarkable book of meditations in classic Christian mystic style: Markings (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964).

Psalm 27 to the exhortation of Micah, which he had used in 1952 in a manner that provided little insight into its meaning for him. This time, he states this meaning quite neatly: "And if doing is part of believing, I find a great design in the simple counsel of the old prophet Micah: 'To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God'."¹⁶ Here there seem to be grounds for interpretation of Micah's words as a call to action, and, if the 1952 context for the quoting of these words is taken into consideration, the action called for is surely specifically ethical action. So it is that Stevenson speaks of the need to live up to beliefs in addition to merely having beliefs, and it is in this context that words from his 1949 speech at the Bloomington Unitarian Church reappear. He picks up his theme of the "chief cause of human discord" being in "the competitive indoctrination among beliefs", and he opposes this undesirable activity to his own belief in "liberalism, in individualism, in freedom of conscience".¹⁷ All of this is consistent with his thought from as far back as the days of the Scopes trial.

This theme was clearly an important one in Stevenson's thought, and it is related to the irrelevance for him of theological distinctions between such men as Fosdick and Niebuhr, in light of their common social ethical and political positions. The cause is "to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God", and the theology of that weighed as nothing in relation to the ethics of it. In

¹⁶Stevenson, loc. cit.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 151-52.

another sphere, this same point is illustrated in an incident told by Stevenson's first cousin, Martin D. Hardin, Jr.:

I recall a conversation I had with Adlai, shortly after he'd returned from a trip to Africa, about Christian missions in that land. He was impressed by the hospitals and the schools established and maintained by missionary groups, but he expressed the wish that they might all have buried their religious and theological differences and cooperated more closely on a purely ethical level. . . . He stuck to his guns, feeling that the squabbles and narrowness of the more orthodox denominations weakened their witness and sapped their effectiveness. . . .¹⁸

It is not belief that was important for Stevenson, but belief-in-action.

So Stevenson extols differences of beliefs among individuals, saying that "without difference life would become lifeless", and, again in the words borrowed from his 1949 speech at Bloomington's Unitarian Church, he rejects "the ideal of total conformity. . . ; the faith that is swallowed like pills, whole and at once, with no questions asked." And this is seen as tied to "the basic faith in liberty of conscience" which is "our bond of unity with all free men".¹⁹ Finally, this ethical position becomes the context in which Stevenson returns to the words of Paul in Galatians 5:1 : "Finally, I should like to live and not just believe those strong words of faith in St. Paul's letter to the Galatians: 'Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and not be [sic] entangled with the yoke of bondage,'"²⁰ Earlier suspicion that the citation of this

¹⁸Letter from Hardin, November 21, 1965.

¹⁹Stevenson, op. cit.

²⁰Ibid.

verse might be rhetorical flourish can be dispensed with here, but it is also clear that for Stevenson the significance of the verse is almost entirely ethical--it is for him only of minimal theological significance and, to lapse completely into theologian's jargon, of no Christological significance. That is to say, Stevenson's citation of Galatians 5:1 here does not seem to allow one to affirm that he passes some test of orthodoxy concerning the divinity of Christ. Again, as in the 1952 statement for Episcopal Churchnews, the 1954 "This I Believe" essay discloses that the heart of Stevenson's religion is in ethics, even though he acknowledges as meaningful an area of personal religious experience. But, as in his response to the Biblical injunction to seek first the kingdom of heaven, the personal and presumably more spiritual area of religious experience receives far less adequate articulation than does the social, ethical area of religion.

Another locus for information about Stevenson's religion is his introduction to the published collection of speeches from the 1952 campaign. There are many interesting facets of this essay, but the central thing for present purposes is the numerous places where Stevenson weaves philosophical and theological observations into a largely autobiographical statement. First, he prefaces it with a quotation from the American pragmatist philosopher, William James. This philosophical text for the autobiographical essay deals with reason, "one of the very feeblest of Nature's forces. . . .

like a small sandbank in the midst of a hungry sea", but a sandbank which James "absolutely believes is bound to grow."²¹ Stevenson then speaks of his campaign efforts as an attempt to contribute to the growth of the sandbank of reason, and he confesses to have been deeply moved by post-election letters which exhorted him "not to lose faith in the ultimate triumph of reason."²² In a broad-brushed survey of his personal history through the Second World War, he reports how he reacted to the unreason of that time, meditating thus: "Was this the everlasting destiny of man, indicted for his stupidity and sin, convicted, sentenced forever to kill or be killed?"²³ The answer to this question for Stevenson is clearly in the Jamesian faith in the growth of reason's sandbank, in the "ultimate triumph of reason" through organizations like the United Nations and through the participation in public affairs of men dedicated to reason and its triumph.

He explains his entry into politics in this manner then, and he claims to have viewed the Governorship of Illinois as "a dramatic opportunity to demonstrate . . . that reason will prevail--'our sandbank is bound to grow'--and that . . . the best government is in fact the best politics. . . ."²⁴ This conception of the politician's task Stevenson associates with the obligation of a candidate to educate citizens and "even a higher mission; honestly to help man to know, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, what he ought to believe; to know what he ought

²¹Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. x.

²²Ibid., p. xi.

²³Ibid., p. xix.

²⁴Ibid., p. xxi.

to desire; to know what he ought to do."²⁵ These three Thomistic desiderata of knowledge are, for Thomas Aquinas the necessary conditions for salvation; Stevenson associates them with the political obligation imposed upon the man with faith in reason. It is tempting to draw a syllogism here, for the clear implication is that, for Stevenson, reason brings salvation--and that position is not far from the mark in interpreting the major thrust of the work of Thomas Aquinas. The major difference between Stevenson's view of reason here and Thomas' view of reason is a rather fine philosophical distinction--one which would not likely have occurred to Stevenson: for Thomas, reason is a tool for the knowledge of God and salvation; for Stevenson, reason functions very much in the place of God. For Stevenson (with James) in this essay, it is reason that will prevail; Thomas would reserve the final victory to God and relegate to reason the task of aiding man's perception of the fact that God will prevail. Once again, as in the case of his use of Paul's phrase about freedom in Christ, Stevenson is found capping his thought with words out of the central Christian theological tradition--but he has used these words out of context, in a way that tends to distort their specifically Christian meaning.

²⁵Ibid., p. xxv. According to J. Bartlett, Familiar Quotations (Thirteenth and Centennial Edition; Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown and Co., 1955), p. 75, the full quotation begins: "Three things are necessary for salvation of man: to know what he ought to believe; etc.". It is taken from Two Precepts of Charity, written in 1273.

As an Elder Statesman.

As Stevenson moved off the center of the nation's political stage in 1960, eventually to be appointed the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, the topic and tone of his public statements changed, and there was, quite naturally, less public concern in the beliefs of the waning generation of leaders. One of the changes in Stevenson's output was that in this later period no statement was composed explicitly to expound his own religious beliefs. Yet there were occasions in which the content of an address dealt primarily with matters of religious belief, and these may be added to the evidence under the title of "explicit public statements" for these years.

One occasion came in May 1961, when the Jewish Theological Seminary of America established in his honor an institution for study in the area of international ethics, called the Adlai Stevenson Foundation. In a speech delivered at the initiation of the Foundation, Stevenson dealt with man's "quest for a world ethic".²⁶ He pointed to universalist religions--such as Judaism--as agents of this quest, but then he turned to his old theme of deploring competitive indoctrination, this time in a very full statement:

It is important for religion to explore those common human values which give people everywhere a sense of belonging to a common world community. For if the growing self-consciousness of national cultures increases,

²⁶New York Times, June 7, 1961, p. 29.

the creedal differences in religious systems may be exploited to accentuate tension in the world society. We would then have . . . the anomaly of universalist religions undermining world brotherhood.²⁷

Here is, as it were, a super-ecumenism--bound together with a statesman's profound pragmatism. The suggestion is that too fine theological distinctions are not simply not very important: they are seen as potentially dangerous. This view is in many respects the same as that of the intelligentsia of the 18th century, as represented for instance in Gotthold Lessing's charming play Nathan der Weise, in which the argument is that warring religionists have no way of demonstrating the greater value of any particular theological view, but that they are all bound together by exceedingly important human values. Consequently, religious strife is simply an unreasonable contradiction and undermining of more fundamental grounds of agreement. Here is certainly a dominant, constant theme of Stevenson's thought on religion.

This same theme is expressed at perhaps its highest literary polish in a short address Stevenson made within six months of his death at the 1965 conference of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, called to discuss the implications of the great encyclical of Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris. Stevenson had been called upon simply to introduce to the conference the President of the United Nations General Assembly, and he took advantage of the occasion to make his own comment on Pope John's message. His interpretation of the Pontiff's meaning was lyrical:

²⁷Ibid.

Underlying his messages and encyclicals was this simple thought: that the human race is a family, that men are brothers, all wars are civil wars, and all killing is fratricidal.²⁸

Here, then, is a "doctrine of man" that lies at the root of Stevenson's condemnation of competitive indoctrination: all men are brothers. This appears to be a first order principle in the face of which theological distinctions must yield and for the protection of which freedom must prevail. It is noteworthy that this principle stands without reference to God, and thus might be called a philosophical more than a theological principle.

The considerations of the importance of human values and of brotherhood of all men, with the corollary value of freedom, led Stevenson in 1963 to talk at the Tenth Anniversary Convocation of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions about his "faith in democracy".²⁹ In his address he spoke of the Center sponsoring the convocation as serving in the function of the church of this faith,³⁰ and then he recast the three Christian "theological virtues" of faith, hope, and charity in terms of a sort of religion of democracy:

²⁸Stevenson, "Introducing the President of the United Nations General Assembly," in Pacem in Terris. Edited by Edward Reed (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1965), p. 18.

²⁹Quoted in Whitman and The New York Times, Portrait, p. 245.

³⁰Stevenson, "The Prospects for Democracy," in Challenges to Democracy: the Next Ten Years. Edited by Edward Reed (New York: Fredrich A. Praeger, Inc., 1963), p. 230.

The study of democratic institutions . . . will be necessary as long as men continue to seek faith in themselves, continue to harbor hope in their own capacity to progress, and cherish the charity that unites them in a common cause.³¹

From this sort of language, Stevenson then moved to a central statement about man, that "he must not be kicked about even with the most high-minded objectives. He is not a means or an instrument. He is an end in himself."³²

But man, whose dignity derives from being an end and not a means, in his natural state leads a Hobbesian "nasty, brutish, and short" life, and it is democracy's job to improve this condition by creating "social order", "equality before the law and the ballot box", and "social and economic opportunity for each man".³³ The expansion of democracy, then, is a consequence of faith in democracy, and Stevenson in his speech saw the United Nations as an instrumentality for this expansion. There is an unspoken analogy in this speech between the function of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions and the function of the United Nations, and between the function of both of these institutions and the function of the church: they all were seen by Stevenson as, at least ideally, furthering "the essence of democracy [which] is the dignity of man."³⁴ Stevenson then closed this speech about the democratic faith with a text, a quotation from Plutarch that he suggested might be the guiding

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid., pp. 231-32.

³³Ibid., pp.232 f.

³⁴Ibid., p. 238.

light that serve in its "church": "Only those persons who live in obedience to reason are worthy to be accounted free. Only they live as they will who have learned what they ought to will."³⁵

The thought in this speech does not hold together very well. The foremost defect in coherence is in Stevenson's description of the nature of man: he is an end in himself; but his natural state does not really reveal this a priori dignity; freedom, however, and equality will produce this dignity; but only men of reason can be accounted free. The only constant, uncontradicted theme of the speech is Stevenson's faith in democracy as serving human ends: it is tempting to conclude that much of the rest of the material is rhetoric.

For the present study, the importance of this speech is primarily in its lack of specifically theological material. There is a passing reference to Judaism's contribution to the development of democracy,³⁶ a condemnation of some manifestations of the church (along with humanism and Marxism),³⁷ and a somewhat philosophical quotation from theologian Reinhold Niebuhr.³⁸ But these instances do not

³⁵Ibid., p. 239.

³⁶Ibid., p. 232: "the Hebrews discovered personal moral responsibility".

³⁷Ibid., p. 231: "the enemies of freedom, whatever . . . ends they propose--the brotherhood of man, the kingdom of saints, 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs'--miss [the] point. . . ."

³⁸Ibid.: "man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary", from R. Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

represent an unarguably theological grounding to the democratic religion, complete with church, that Stevenson set forth. There is, in fact, an abandonment of theology in this discussion of Stevenson's faith in democracy.

Conclusions.

Stevenson's explicit public statements on his religion prove to be mainly concerned with ethics. There is indication that for him personally, the ethical motivation comes from deep religious experience, from a sense of his personal inadequacies in the face of existential questions of life and death and human relationships and in the face of the vastness of the universe. But on the level of public policy, at least in his later years, Stevenson attempted to divorce ethics from religious experience and to articulate an atheological faith in democracy, based on a view of the brotherhood of all men.

In quoting Biblical materials and the words of theologians, Stevenson's constant habit was to ignore their original context and to invest them with his own meaning. It is therefore not possible to point to such uses of theological materials as indications of Stevenson's agreement with the thought they represent; rather, it is necessary to try to interpret that part of the meaning of such quotations that Stevenson had appropriated for himself. This same sort of rule would also apply to his use of philosophical materials, such as his quotations from William James and from Plutarch.

The use of this approach to such material, which usually appears in the form of a "text" for the peroration of a speech or statement, reveals "political freedom responsibly executed" as the common thread of Stevenson's meaning as he quotes theological and philosophical authorities. Stevenson quotes St. Paul as authority for calling for human freedom, St. Thomas Aquinas as authority for calling for responsible political leadership, William James as authority for seeing the primacy of reason in political leadership, Plutarch as authority for naming reason as the prerequisite of freedom, Pope John XXIII as authority for enunciating the brotherhood of all men, Micah and the whole Jewish tradition as authority for recognizing the importance of personal ethical responsibility, and Reinhold Niebuhr as authority for pronouncing the soundness of democracy over other systems of political organization.

This collection of authorities cited is a very interesting one. In the case of every man among them, the important element in their lives was the clarification and pronouncement of reality as they saw it in their times. In the case of each of these men, save Plutarch, they were denounced as heretics by important segments of their societies. In the case of every one of these authorities, their work became part of a new orthodoxy in the establishment of which they were often central figures; and, in addition, these were all men of no little political skill. It would be stretching a point to claim that Stevenson realized all this as he gathered

quotable materials for his speeches, but it is indeed interesting to note the coincidences among the lives of those authors Stevenson chose to cite in his central statements dealing with his own faith. Certainly one can say that Stevenson was attracted to the articulate heretic and that he found the words of such men comforting and supportive of his own convictions.

There seems to be a development in these explicit statements about religion, a development that might be called "detheologizing". As has been shown, Stevenson was very reserved in all discussions of his personal religion, and he was also fairly unsophisticated and inarticulate in his theology. So it was perhaps not without wisdom that he abandoned personal theological confessions; there is evidence that some of this wisdom was from his advisers. Galbraith reported to the author that "most of the people around [Stevenson] were strongly secularist. He was more inclined than the people around him to go into references to God. Schlesinger and I wouldn't let him do that."³⁹

In the place of theological language, philosophical and then political language took over as Stevenson strove to articulate his faith. Religion, in this development, came to be seen as a buttress for democracy, and the replacement of theological by political language is reminiscent of words of Stevenson from early in his career, recorded in one of the Stevenson biographies: "after all, democracy is nothing more

³⁹Interview with Galbraith, November 30, 1965.

than an attempt to apply Christian principles to a human society."⁴⁰ This statement is illustrative of the naturalness of Stevenson's growth into religious thought and practice noted in Chapter I and of the straightforwardness with which he applies statements of theologians and philosophers to his own formulations. His reserve in speaking about personal religious experience, his lack of success with theological language generally, his view of religion as having primarily to do with ethics, and perhaps the pressures of advisers such as Galbraith, urging him to abandon references to God--all of these seem to have brought about a shift in Stevenson in which religion comes out as politics.

⁴⁰N. Bush, Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois (New York: Ferrar, Straus & Young, 1952), p. 229. It is interesting in this context to note a theme found in the literature of the Unitarian Church, to which Stevenson surely exposed himself. One editorial note from the denomination's monthly magazine in 1955 exhorted, "Let us remember that democracy is a religion. It is heir to all that is best in Christianity and the secular idealism of the past. . . . It is a faith, a faith in man and in the nature that sustains him." (Bachus, Burdette, "We Believe What We Must," The Christian Register, CXXXIV, November 1955, p. 6).

CHAPTER III: PUBLIC SPEECHES AND PAPERS: THE THOUGHT AND THE MAN

The explicit statements about religion represent a very small fraction of the total amount of published material by Stevenson. Although they reveal a great deal about the man, still much more is to be learned from his speeches. Here, behind the veil of the dominant themes of a political philosophy, is to be seen a man of humility, viewing his society and playing his special role in it.

The Dominant Themes.

There are four terms that echo through the Stevenson speeches and papers to such an extent that, even if one wished to, he could not avoid them. An indexing of all of Stevenson's books using only these four terms and their equivalents would include about half of the pages published. These terms are: faith, human brotherhood, freedom, and responsibility, often appearing in combinations with each other.

In Call to Greatness, Stevenson's Harvard Godkin Lectures, dealing with America's responsibilities in the modern world, "faith" is one of America's resources that she has to offer to the world: "The tempered use of our power, the

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sympathetic understanding of people's 'yearning to breathe free', the modest proffer of our ideas and faith--these constitute the true resources of America and the treasured hope of our civilization."¹ The reader is led to ask "what faith?" or "faith in what or whom?". Unfortunately, in the Godkin Lectures Stevenson does not directly answer these questions, beyond pointing to what he considered the basic meaning of America: the "heretical notion that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed. . . ."² The meaning could be rephrased as "the democratic faith", or "faith in democracy", or "faith in the people".

This faith in democracy, in the people, is amplified throughout Stevenson's political writings. In his welooming address to the 1952 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, he spoke of the people of the American Middle West, saying "We want only the faith and conviction that triumph in free and fair contest."³ It is this same democratic faith of which Stevenson speaks in the heat of the 1954 Congressional campaigns in an exhortation before the New York Democratic County Committee: "if we lose faith in each other, we have lost everything; and no party victory is worth this. . . . Men may differ about issues without differing about their faith in America."⁴ It is this faith, indeed, that is the "mainspring" of the American way, and it is a

¹Stevenson, Call to Greatness (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 76.

²Ibid., p. 7. ³Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 3.

⁴Stevenson, The Stevenson Wit and Wisdom (Edited by Paul Steiner, New York: Pyramid Publications, 1965), p. 102.

dynamic, converting faith: "Our faith is that in the long contest the totalitarians will gradually be converted to our way of thinking. . . ." ⁵ In fact, the totalitarians, in the form of Soviet Russia, have to some extent appropriated this faith, albeit in an altered way, even while in the West there has been some weakening of it; "their faith is in many ways an evil perversion of the great propositions that once made the blood course in Western veins. . . ." ⁶ This faith is "faith in the American way of life" ⁷, involving "faith in ourselves and in the limitless creativeness of free men" ⁸ as the problems of modern society are faced up to. It is this democratic faith that is the measure of a political leader, as Stevenson meditates upon his central hero of the American tradition in a 1959 essay entitled "Lincoln's Faith". In this work, Stevenson speaks of the Civil War President's "faith in democracy, in the ability of the people to govern themselves" and of his "deep faith in mankind." ⁹ Finally, "if the supreme test of a democratic leader is his democratic faith," Stevenson affirms of his hero, ". . . Lincoln stands pre-eminent." ¹⁰

The democratic faith of Stevenson, it is seen, is intimately tied to a second theme of human brotherhood: "democracy

⁵Stevenson, Putting First Things First, (New York: Random House, 1960), p. 8.

⁶Ibid., p. 31.

⁷. . . Wit and Wisdom, p. 86.

⁸Putting First Things First, p. 111.

⁹Ibid., pp. 113 and 115.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 115.

rests on those eternal principles of justice, freedom and practical, concrete acceptance of the dignity and worth of every human being."¹¹ It was the strength of Pope John XXIII, in Stevenson's view, that he recognized and repeatedly articulated "this concept of 'the human family'--'the sons of God', 'the brotherhood of all mankind'."¹² The root of the American commitment to the United Nations, according to Stevenson, was that that organization stands for a concept of the world "in which all men are brothers and all brothers are somehow, wondrously, different--save in their need for peace."¹³ And again, it was the theme of Stevenson's 1952 campaign for the Presidency that the Democratic Party should urge the American people to make decisions to involve themselves in the "struggle which alone can assure triumph over the great enemies of man--war, poverty and tyranny--and the assaults upon human dignity which are the most grievous consequences of each."¹⁴ The task of American leaders, Stevenson said in 1954, is to "reconvert a population soaked in the spirit of materialism to the spirit of humanism".¹⁵ This task is the consequence of the raison d'être of America, summed up in

¹¹ . . . Wit and Wisdom, p. 121.

¹² Stevenson, Looking Outward (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 268-69.

¹³ Stevenson, "Address at the Commemorative Meeting. . . on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Signing of the United Nations Charter," (United States Mission to the United Nations Press Release No. 4597, June 26, 1965 - Mimeographed), p. 5.

¹⁴ Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 10.

¹⁵ Whitman and The New York Times, Portrait: Adlai E. Stevenson, p. 128.

what Stevenson believed to be Lincoln's vision of "America as the trustee for humanity."¹⁶

The theme of human brotherhood, or humanism, or humanity--Stevenson used many alternative phrases--is inseparable from almost any Stevenson utterance. One of his fullest expressions of this theme came in the last paragraph of the last prepared speech he was to give, at a session of the United Nations Economic and Social Council. The concept is cast in the form of a parable, and Stevenson's language is borrowed from Lincoln:

We travel together, passengers on a little space ship, dependent on its vulnerable reserves of air and soil; all committed for our safety to its security and peace; preserved from annihilation only by the care, the work, and I will say the love we give our fragile craft. We cannot maintain it half fortunate, half miserable, half confident, half despairing, half slave--to the ancient enemies of man--half free in a liberation of resources undreamed of until this day. No craft, no crew can travel safely with such vast contradictions. On their resolution depends the survival of us all.¹⁷

If the democratic faith has to do with an affirmation of human values and of the brotherhood of man, it also has to do with freedom, a third dominant theme in the Stevenson literature. Indeed, the democratic faith is as much faith in freedom as it is faith in mankind; Stevenson describes freedom as America's "great central pulse", and it is "our truth, our brotherhood--the supreme truth of freedom."¹⁸

¹⁶Putting First Things First, p. 114.

¹⁷Stevenson, "Statement at the 39th Session of the Economic and Social Council. . . . July 9, 1965" (United States Mission to the United Nations Press Release No. 4599, June 9, 1965 - Mimeographed), p. 14.

¹⁸Putting First Things First, p. 32.

Freedom is "a political and moral fact" about America, "the first community in which men set out in principle to institutionalize freedom, responsible government and human equality."¹⁹ It is freedom which protects the human values that are so central to Stevenson's thought, and so it is a part of what America has to offer to the world. "What individual freedom under law means is hard for people who have never had it to understand," wrote Stevenson in reflection on a visit to Russia in 1959, "but it is our most precious possession and we should be proud and eager to exhibit it; besides, it is the best hope for the future."²⁰

Freedom for Stevenson was both a reward and an obligation, and so enters a fourth theme of his speeches. "Freedom is the reward of responsibility,"²¹ he said at one point. But he also wrote that "freedom is not an ideal, it is not even a protection, if it means nothing more than freedom to stagnate, to live without dreams, to have no greater aim than a second car and another television set--and this in a world where half our fellow men have less than enough to eat."²² Thus freedom is inextricable from responsibility, and these are no mere individualistic notions, for they involve the very relationship of the nation to the world at large: "the ordeal of our times . . . is a challenge to American maturity and American responsibility."²³

¹⁹Looking Outward, p. 263.

²⁰Stevenson, Friends and Enemies (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pp. 97-98.

²¹Call to Greatness, p. 37. ²²Putting First Things First, p. 25-

²³Call to Greatness, p. 99.

A politically costly accusation of Stevenson, made by the Republican Party, was that he was an "egghead" who talked over the people's heads. He tried to make light of this charge,²⁴ for it hit at a vital spot, and one directly related to the theme of responsibility. Late in the 1952 campaign, he countered the charge without joking in these words: "What I have to say . . . is intended for your heads and not your hands. . . . If I were more comforted by your cheers than your thoughts, I would hardly merit the confidence of responsible men."²⁵ One entire book of Stevenson's speeches and papers, Putting First Things First, may be seen as given over to the presentation of Stevenson's thoughts on the many responsibilities imposed upon followers of the democratic faith, the beneficiaries of freedom who are dedicated to the cause of the brotherhood of man. The title speech of that book and another speech entitled "Today's Most Fateful Fact" deal with international responsibilities in much the same way as did Call to Greatness, his Godkin Lectures. The second speech, "Our Broken Mainspring", suggests the

²⁴Among the several ways Stevenson developed of meeting the "egghead issue", one worth recording, the most "eggheady" one, was at Harvard University, where he said to an audience: "I am uncomfortably reminded of those classic words that never occurred to Horace: 'Via ovicpitem dura est', or for the benefit of the engineers among you: 'The way of the egghead is hard'." (Call to Greatness, p. vi.)

²⁵Quoted in Whitman and The New York Times, op. cit., p. 95.

responsibility of extending the values of freedom and humanity within our society. Two chapters, "The Public Responsibility of Private Power" and "Businessmen who Think Greatly", attempt to convince business leaders that their responsibilities to society are directly proportionate to their wealth and power. Two other addresses deal specifically with public responsibility for the improvement of education and of the urban environment. The last chapter is "Lincoln's Faith", and it is the capstone of the book, standing as a sort of sermon on the life of a man who recognized fully the responsibilities of membership in the human brotherhood and the life of freedom under the democratic faith. So it is that Stevenson's dominant themes converge into a robust, secular political philosophy.

The Man Behind the Words.

The man who enunciated these great themes is somewhat lost in the description of them, and it is good to return to the speeches with a view to finding more of Stevenson there than his political philosophy. When this is done, a picture which emerges is that of a religious teacher.

The adjective "religious" here refers not so much to Stevenson's teaching itself as it does to his person. Indeed, as Chapter I and II have shown, Stevenson was not really theologically articulate enough to be a teacher of religion. But there are religious aspects of his personality that come through the surface of his speeches. Perhaps the most obvious

of these religious aspects derive from his strong views on responsibility: this is his "note of ethical concern--not the copy-book moralism which passes for morality today, but a self-critical and searching comparison of what we say with what we do".²⁶ There are in addition two other obvious religious elements: a personal piety, and humility.

The matters of ethical concern, of course, have to be concrete to have relevance, and once they are concrete they become subject to the pressures of politics. Even admitting, therefore, the political overtones of many of the concrete ethical problems that Stevenson dealt with publicly, it also must be admitted even by Stevenson's political opponents that he was unusually articulate in ethics. Each phase of his public career brought with it certain outstanding moments of ethical demand, from corruption among a few of his appointees as Governor of Illinois to humiliating lie-telling in the United Nations in connection with the Cuban crisis of 1961. But two instances in particular speak of Stevenson's ethical courage. One was in 1952 when he was bold and unhesitating in condemning Senator Joseph R. Mc Carthy and his hysterical witch-hunting methods. Even before he was a candidate for the Presidency, he declared that "while we must root out treachery mercilessly, let's not burn down the barn to roast the pig. McCarthyism has become a synonym for false accusation and careless denunciation."²⁷ This was a declaration

²⁶A. Schlesinger, Jr., and S.E. Harris, "Introduction", in Stevenson, The New America, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), p. xxix.

²⁷E.K. Lindley, "Interview: How Governor Views Current Issues," Newsweek, XXXIX, April 14, 1952, p. 35.

that Stevenson's political opponent never could bring himself to make. A second instance was in connection to the opposition Vice-Presidential candidate in 1956, Richard M. Nixon. About him Stevenson declared that the people have "reason to mistrust Mr. Nixon, for on several . . . issues he has taken an equally firm stand on both sides. Mr. Nixon's advertisers call him 'adaptable'. Well, that's just the trouble. For what 'adaptable' means here is that this man has no standard of truth but convenience and no standard of morality except what will serve his interest in an election."²⁸ Such a statement is of course suspect for having been made in the heat of campaign; on the other hand, such attacks on other men were not in character for Stevenson. The explanation for this language is his highly ethical view of the responsibilities of public leadership, a view which many of his Democratic partisans, especially in 1952, felt cost Stevenson the Presidency.

Stevenson's personal piety came through at its strongest in his 1952 speech in acceptance of the Democratic Party's nomination for the Presidency, an honor which he sought to avoid. The most moving passage of that speech contains some of the most memorable words Stevenson ever uttered: "I have asked the Merciful Father--the Father of us all--to let this cup pass from me. But from such dread responsibility one does not shrink in fear, in self-interest, or in false humility. So, 'If this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it,

²⁸The New America, p. 249.

Thy will be done."²⁹ This was still early in Stevenson's national career, before the alleged "de-God-ing" of Stevenson's speeches under the influence of Galbraith and other "secularist" advisers.³⁰ Something more of the religious depth of the man is revealed in this statement than in several of the more explicit religious statements that were the subject of Chapter II. There seems to be a *prima facie* authenticity in this prayerful utterance that lends credence to other similar statements that might otherwise be dismissed as rhetoric. And the occasions for such references to God and, more particularly, to prayer were fairly numerous in 1952, although they grew fewer and fewer as the years passed. In 1952 he talked to the American Legion about patriotism, and in the course of the speech he mentioned special interest groups, saying that "I have resisted them before and I hope the Almighty will give me strength to do so again."³¹ At the end of the 1952 campaign, his last pre-election words to the voters were: "I shall also ask Our Lord to make me an instrument of His peace."³² In the Godkin Lectures, Stevenson spoke of "the interdependent world that we Americans must live in, work in and pray for in accents of humility and faith in a power greater than ours, our enemies' or any man's."³³ One of the last speeches of the 1956 campaign ended with a

²⁹Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 7.

³⁰See Chapter II, page 46.

³¹Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 19.

³²Ibid., p. 316.

³³Call to Greatness, p. 37.

summons to "courage and vision . . . , to great deeds-- with, above all, a prayer for the guidance of the God we love. . . ." ³⁴ These passing public prayers give much stronger evidence of Stevenson's faith in God and practice of prayer than do the fairly incoherent explicit statements in which he attempted to articulate that faith.

The third religious element of the man that is revealed in a reading of his writings is Stevenson's humility. The locus classicus for this is in his 1952 acceptance speech: "I accept your nomination--and your program. I should have preferred to hear those words uttered by a stronger, a wiser, a better man than myself." ³⁵ This humility is also clear in a small joke that he repeatedly told on himself after particularly flattering introductions: "I have sometimes said that flattery is all right, Mr. President, if you don't inhale. Well, you have made it very hard for me not to inhale, thanks to a charity and kindness which have touched me so deeply." ³⁶ These examples may appear inadequate as definite "proof" of humility, and so they are. But this is an elusive quality, and one that comes through total impressions and patterns of expression as much as through specific words. In phonograph records ³⁷ of Stevenson interviews and speeches,

³⁴ The New America, p. 274.

³⁵ Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 7.

³⁶ Looking Outward, p. 3.

³⁷ The two records currently readily available are Portrait of Adlai Stevenson: In Conversation with Arnold Michaelis (Spoken Arts 770) and Adlai E. Stevenson: The Man, the Candidate, the Statesman (The Macmillan Company AS101 61147).

his humility is as much in his tone of voice and in brief, nervous laughter in response to flattery as it is in the content of what he is saying. In his political context, the Stevenson humility is found also in his contrast to Truman's boisterous swagger, to Eisenhower's confident preachments, to Dulles' moralistic dicta, to Kennedy's studied projection of an image, and to Johnson's public egoism. So what Stevenson did not say and do as well as what he did say and do contribute equally to the impression of his humility, an impression that seems to indicate a fulfillment of his promise to the 1952 Democratic Convention that "I shall always try 'to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with my God,'"³⁸

The speed and the firmness with which the term "egghead" stuck to Stevenson testify to the impression he made as a teacher. It was, in fact, part of his definition of his role that he should instruct the people: "even politicians should be teachers," he said in the opening remarks of an address to the National School Boards Association.³⁹ One way in which he carried out this teaching role was by his constant reference to the wisdom of others, especially in the past, in form of quotations; in just two of his books, representing a course of three lectures on foreign policy, two articles, and six other addresses, he cites about forty different sages

³⁸Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 10.

³⁹Putting First Things First, p. 87.

in the course of his argumentations.⁴⁰ Another manifestation of Stevenson as a teacher was his constant appearance as a speaker at college and university commencement ceremonies.⁴¹ So in these quite obvious ways, Stevenson was forever teaching.

The more subtle way in which the teacher in Stevenson appeared in his speeches was a result of a basic conviction about the proper functioning of the democratic process. He expressed this conviction most cogently during the 1956 campaign in an address at Yale University: "I don't believe any victory is worth winning in a democracy unless it can be won by placing full trust in the members of the democracy. I mean giving people the hard facts and the hard decisions--trusting their sobriety and their judgment. . . ."⁴² This approach to politics, to which Stevenson was faithful and which is directly related to his "democratic faith", requires the approach of a teacher.

⁴⁰It is tempting to list these authorities Stevenson cites, but it is perhaps more valuable to indicate a few general characteristics. About a quarter of them are American--mostly statesmen and jurists, about half are English, and the remainder are divided equally between the Bible and Frenchmen and Germans. Over half of the authorities Stevenson cites--that is, almost all except the Bible and contemporary sources--may be said to have been more or less directly informed by the 18th century Enlightenment. The two books surveyed for this brief analysis are: Call to Greatness and Putting First Things First.

⁴¹Nine of these commencement addresses have found their way into the published collections of Stevenson's writings. About an equal number of speeches that were originally delivered at other educational convocations are also in the Stevenson books.

⁴²The New America, p. 227.

Conclusions.

Stevenson emerges from his speeches, then, as a man of somewhat gentle qualities, lacking in cant, and as a teacher of basic, interrelated themes of the democratic faith. In the light of what is known about his religious life, from the reports of others, and from his own explicit statements, it appears that he was more gifted as a "doer" of religion than as a "thinker". At least the impression of his ethical concern, personal piety, and humility, gained from reading his general speeches, is more convincing to this author than are his relatively inarticulate efforts to set forth his beliefs.

It must also be said that his teachings, though often eloquently expressed, are not strikingly original, as is indicated by his repeated citations from thinkers of the past. Indeed, the presentation of the themes of Stevenson's thought in this chapter is somewhat misleading and synthetic, for the themes have been isolated from their contexts, and so Stevenson's concrete applications of these themes are lacking. And to this warning must be added that of another author, commenting on Stevenson's mind:

That Stevenson's mind was less probing than it seemed is demonstrated by a rereading of his speeches. Their phrasing is brilliant, often inspired, but developed argument is frequently lacking. He excelled in giving swift impressions, at stating visions and goals, at calling to greatness, at denouncing the obscurantism of McCarthyism, at evoking man's higher instincts; yet his argumentation was loose. His mind, however, was in the right place, and he desperately wanted intelligence to be brought to bear on problems. He strove to make

people think, to achieve mastery by their brains, to act with reasoned temper; and so it may perhaps be beside the point to inquire too closely behind the luster of his speeches and the magic of his words.⁴³

It would thus seem in order to move from looking behind Stevenson's words to looking toward the issues to which he pointed by them.

⁴³Whitman and The New York Times, op. cit., pp. 276-77.

CHAPTER IV: RELIGIOUS ROLES OF THE STATESMAN

The search for understanding Stevenson's faith has gone from interviews with his friends and associates, to a survey of religion in his personal history, to explicit public statements on religion and to an examination of the thought and public character of the man. It remains now to report on certain aspects of Stevenson's public life in which, though acting consciously as a statesman, he functioned in something of a religious role. In a nation some of whose roots are deeply in Protestant religious soil, with that soil's emphasis on the "priesthood of all believers" and on the prophetic calling of the Christian, it is ironic that most Americans today do not often think of their statesmen as having religious roles. When Americans do think of their leaders in such ways, it is often only in connection with the issuance of Thanksgiving Day proclamations and attendance at an "Annual Prayer Breakfast". It is not to such functions as this that the author refers in thinking of Stevenson's religious roles, but rather to some more fundamental approaches to issues of national life.

Stevenson and the Church.

Stevenson's formal church relationships have already been dealt with. They form a doctrinally confusing picture,

as he maintained full membership in both a Unitarian and a Trinitarian institution. It has been suggested that this confusion wanes in importance as certain data of Stevenson's personal life come into focus; the confusion is also unimportant in relation to Stevenson's view of the Church's task.

In a somewhat ambiguous statement, Stevenson asserted his opinion that "religious faith remains . . . our greatest national resource."¹ Light is thrown on his meaning here by a rather more specific statement he once made on the relation between the church and the nation:

The church teaches the dignity of man and devotion to God and country. These are likewise fundamental precepts of government as we understand it. The stamping out of slavery in every form, the preservation of the rights of individual citizens, the protection of the dignity of man, the elimination of intolerance, and the preservation of religious freedom, all these are things to which the churches and free governments are jointly committed.²

It is curious, and not at all psychologically inexplicable, that Stevenson, according to these quotations, saw the Church's function in much the same way as he saw his own. The politician is a teacher; the church teaches. The church deals in the dignity of man and in human freedom; two of Stevenson's major themes had to do with human dignity and human freedom. There are two clear interpretations of these coincidences: Stevenson projected his own role onto that of

¹Stevenson, "The Faith of the Candidates," Episcopal Churchnews, CXX, September 21, 1952, p. 23.

²Quoted in Busch, N.F., Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois, p. 226.

the Church; Stevenson saw himself as fulfilling, within his own powers, the role of the Church. These interpretations are certainly not mutually exclusive, but a remark of Stevenson's reported earlier seems to indicate that, if he thought consciously about this issue, he thought he was performing a function of the Church: "after all, democracy is nothing more than an attempt to apply Christian principles to a human society."³

Writing in 1958 in The Christian Century, Stevenson confessed to a change of view about the role of the Church, or, rather, of the Church's ministry. He reported that "as a boy, I used to think about [ministers'] spiritual importance, about their importance as educators." The change was that, lately, he had noted that:

in this era of conformity, it has often been the ministers who like the prophets of old have spoken out for the values of democracy. . . . Latterly, it seems to be the rabbi, the minister, the priest who has the courage to withstand the pressures of these times and to speak his piece with boldness and with persistence on behalf of the good, the right and the just.⁴

The specific issue Stevenson cites for this statement is the pressure that Quakers, Unitarians, and Albert Schweitzer, in his view, brought to bear for the beginning of negotiations for a nuclear testing ban.

It must be said that this change of view was not really very great. Indeed, it is hard to perceive any change from

³Ibid., p. 229.

⁴Stevenson, "Religion and Courage," The Christian Century, LXXV, December 31, 1958, p. 1511.

from the 1958 Christian Century statement and those about religion as a national resource and teacher of human dignity. Perhaps the change was between Stevenson's idea of what the Church ought to be doing and his perception that the Church (more precisely, its clergy) was in fact now doing what he all along had thought was its appropriate task. The 1958 statement is also colored by one other significant detail: it was Stevenson who, in the 1956 Presidential campaign, had first suggested that nuclear testing ban negotiations be initiated. He had been roundly condemned by the Republican Party, Eisenhower, and all the majesty of the United States Government for making this suggestion. Indeed, some analysts believe that the proposal was one of the turning points against Stevenson in that campaign. So it is natural that Stevenson should take kindly to those who picked up and pressed forward a proposal that had been a political liability.

But there is, in spite of these necessary comments on the 1958 statement, a clear position on the functions of the Church. It should be teaching human dignity and freedom, and actively working to these ends. The model for at least the latter of these functions is that of the Old Testament prophets. There is lacking from Stevenson's articulated view the aspect of the Church as a community, which, as was set forth in Chapter I, was a factor of some importance in his life.

Stevenson as Preacher and Priest.

The suggestive idea that Stevenson saw himself as fulfilling the role of the Church in his own activities as a statesman seems to bear fruit. He is found on several occasions to be preaching to his audiences what he believes to be the burden of Christianity, and in his later years it sometimes seemed that he was the Nation's High Priest for funerals, so often was he called upon to express his countrymen's grief over the death of the world's greats.

So, as preacher, Stevenson explains that "everywhere people cling to their hope and their faith in freedom and justice and peace . . . because the Master's teachings forever nourish the soul and spirit of men."⁵ He asks rhetorically, implying an affirmative response, whether "the evangelical virtue of charity can be translated into political terms. . . ."⁶ He challenges his listeners in another speech to recover "the Christian truth of brotherly love" and to make "what man owes to God and his neighbor . . . a common theme of public discourse."⁷ At another time, he set forth by example in quite moving language precisely that sort of public discourse for which he called:

We believe that man is made in the image of God and that to trample on man is to trample on God. Our future depends on living up to that faith and instilling it in others; for we know that just as no

⁵ . . . Wit and Wisdom, p. 121. ⁶ Ibid., p. 120.

⁷ Putting First Things First, pp. 32 and 43.

man is an island unto himself--so no nation can isolate itself from its responsibilities to fellow men everywhere.⁸

Stevenson the preacher, it is not surprising to note, preaches the same themes that Stevenson the statesman pronounces. Thus the preacher calls people to faith; the faith has to do as much, if not more, with one's fellow man as it does with God; it is all working toward freedom; there is no avoidance of responsibilities. It seems quite clear that there was for Stevenson no basic difference between the burden of the Christian message and the burden of his own political message; the preaching of the one, for him, was the setting forth of the other. The message of the Bible could be applied directly, in the most straightforward manner. A final example of this preaching technique occurs in a speech on the American obligation to the United Nations: "It is written in the Bible that 'to whom much is given, of him also much shall be required.' I think this applies to us, the American people. For surely much is given to us, and much will be required of us for many years to come."⁹

One of the tasks of a priest is to gather up people's grief at the time of death, and to interpret death to the living. This was a task that fell to Stevenson on several occasions as in the first half of the 1960s many of the world's greats met death: Dag Hammarskjöld, Eleanor Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, and Winston Churchill, to mention only a

⁸What I Think, p. 170.

⁹Looking Outward, p. 138.

few. Stevenson played a very special role in the national response to the death of each of these leaders.

He represented the United States to the world at the death of Dag Hammarskjöld. Stevenson eulogized Hammarskjöld at the United Nations for his "humility and for his "passion for the rule of reason and decency",¹⁰ and then, in a poetic expression of the solidarity of the human race, at the funeral in Uppsala, Sweden, he declared: "Uppsala was the world today, for he was a hero of the community of man, and he is gone when we needed him most."¹¹

A little more than a year later, Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a close personal friend of Stevenson's, also died. Again Stevenson led national--and world--mourning as he interpreted Eleanor Roosevelt's life to the world: "She would rather light candles than curse the darkness, and her glow had warmed the world."¹² Her strength, he indicated, was in her "faith in her fellowman and his future. . . ."¹³ And, in a eulogy given at the services in New York at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, Stevenson summed up his grief: "We are always saying farewell in this world, always standing at the edge of loss attempting to retrieve some memory, some human meaning, from the silence, something which was precious and is gone."¹⁴

Yet another year passed, and President Kennedy was assassinated. Every national leader had something to say at

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹Ibid., p. 28.

¹²Ibid., p. 113.

¹³Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 294.

that time of great shock and grief, but Stevenson's statement was unique among all those reported in the New York Times: "At such a moment we can only turn to prayer--prayer to comfort our grief, to sustain Mrs. Kennedy and his family, to strengthen President Johnson and to guide us in time to come. May God help us."¹⁵ Stevenson was the only leader to urge prayer and to pray at that moment; the witness in action gave content to his very amorphous statements of earlier times and was, further, a priestly act.

Later, at the United Nations, Stevenson eulogized the martyred President, and it is important to note what he chose to praise him for:

Like the ancient prophets, he loved the people enough to warn them of their errors. . . . [He believed in a] concept of a permanently expanding society spreading abundance . . . and extending justice, tolerance, and dignity to all its citizens alike. . . . [He] met and mastered his responsibility to wield great power with great restraint . . . [and he] held fast to a vision of a world in which peace is secure; in which inevitable conflicts are reconciled by pacific means¹⁶

The final eulogy Stevenson was to deliver was at the memorial services in Washington at the National Cathedral upon the death of Winston Churchill. He declared that "Churchill's life uplifts our hearts and fills us with fresh revelation of the scale and reach of human achievement. . . . All the zest and life and confidence of this man sprang, I believe, not only from the rich endowment of nature but also from a profound and simple faith in God."¹⁷ Again, Stevenson

¹⁵The New York Times, November 23, 1963, p. 8.

¹⁶Ibid., November 27, 1963, p. 23.

¹⁷Ibid., January 29, 1965, p. 6.

acted in the priestly role of interpreting to his countrymen and the world the life and death of a great man.

The reason for reporting at such length the content of Stevenson's eulogies is in the first place to demonstrate "Stevenson as priest". But it also serves another purpose, for it is surely true that the values a man holds most dear are those he most praises in others. This being so, it would seem equally true that the loss a man feels most at the death of one he had admired or loved is that aspect of the one mourned to which the heart of the mourner responded most deeply. In Stevenson's eulogies, there are recurring themes, and these themes again coincide with the themes of his political speeches: Hammarskjöld in life worked for the community of man; Eleanor Roosevelt's faith was in her fellowman; Kennedy worked for the extension of justice, tolerance, and dignity of men, and he acted with responsibility; Churchill's life revealed the great dimensions of human achievement. And throughout all of this, there is a gentle awareness of the fragility of human life and achievement, even in the midst of praise of the same. There is surely a deep unity among the various aspects of Stevenson's thought: the religious man, the politician, the preacher and priest are all found to be saying the same things.

Stevenson as Prophet.

The first thing about John F. Kennedy to which Stevenson pointed in eulogy was that "like the prophets, he loved the

people enough to warn them of their errors."¹⁸ The same can be said of Stevenson himself; he was constantly warning the people of their errors. In the 1952 campaign, he spoke to the American Legion on the true meaning of patriotism, he declared his commitment to civil liberties to audiences in Richmond, Virginia, he spoke to labor unions about the need to supervise and control some of labor's power, he told businessmen about the rightness of liberalizing some of the Federal labor laws. In the 1956 campaign, he followed the same pattern, only with greater intensity.

He was committed first and foremost, in these moods, to the "recognition of actuality", which he once gave as the definition of diplomacy.¹⁹ Commitment to the recognition of actuality is precisely the function of a prophet in the Old Testament: "the great prophets were called to give voice to the truth present in history. It was their function to define the meaning of the history in which Israel was involved in a given present."²⁰ It is in the light of this understanding of the prophets that it is possible to consider "Stevenson as prophet".

There are two themes that typically appear in the writings of a prophet: the awareness of values that have been ignored, and an acute sense of the need for action, for reform, in the immediate future. These themes are clearly in Stevenson's

¹⁸Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹Call to Greatness, p. 54.

²⁰H.H. Guthrie, Jr., God and History in the Old Testament (Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1960), p. 73.

writings--indeed, they are the whole point of a very long article that first appeared in Foreign Affairs in 1960, entitled "Putting First Things First":

We cannot live by tail fins, TV and a "sound dollar" alone. Somehow we must lift our sights to the level of the tasks. . . . It is the task of leadership to marshal our will and point the way. We had better start soon for time is wasting.²¹

There is not a little echo here of Biblical phraseology: "Man shall not live by bread alone" is a phrase both in the Gospels (Matthew 4:4 and Luke 4:4) and in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 8:3); the idea that time is wasting is found both in the writings of the Prophets and in the New Testament, especially in the writings of St. Paul (for example, Romans 13:11 -- "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep").

Another prophetic theme is to recall a people to the principles upon which they were originally constituted, and in the Old Testament this often took the form of reminding the nation of the proper worship of God. This theme, too, is in Stevenson's utterances; it is especially strong in his acceptance speech at the 1956 Democratic Convention:

There is a spiritual hunger in the world today and it cannot be satisfied by material things alone. . . . Our forefathers came here to worship God. We must not let our aspirations so diminish that our worship becomes rather of material achievement and bigness. . . . Once we were proud to confess that an American is a man who wants peace and believes in a better future and loves his fellow man. We must reclaim these great Christian and humane ideas. We must dare to say again that the American cause is the cause of all mankind.²²

²¹Putting First Things First, pp. 9 and 26.

²²The New America, p. 9.

One former associate of Stevenson discounts this entire passage, asserting that "when [Stevenson] didn't know quite what to say, he said things like that."²³ But this dismissal is much too cavalier, for the evidence from the whole of Stevenson's thought and religious experience all tends to support an interpretation of such a passage as being more or less consciously prophetic. It has already been pointed out that Stevenson was not adept at articulating theoretical aspects of his faith, but that rather he continually returned to concrete examples to express religious meanings. Just as his humility was clearer in his tone of voice and in an occasional gesture or joke than in specific words; as his personal piety is clearer in almost inadvertent prayers and references to God's power than in his articulations about "some transcendent power"; so, too, Stevenson's dedication "to do justly and to love mercy" is clearer in its prophetic applications to concrete issues than it is in his assertion that he wishes to fulfill this high requirement of spiritual life.

"Stevenson as prophet" was not a personality trotted out only in Presidential election years (the examples given above might have given that impression). It was rather a steady aspect of his public character that was sustained by a strong sense of the irony in history which lead him to question the structures of his society at all times. A better-known example of this sense of irony and ability to question

²³Interview with Galbraith, November 30, 1965.

his own nation's doings is his Godkin Lectures of 1954, in which he pointed to many national failings in the approach to and conduct of foreign policy. The chief failings attacked in these lectures are a national self-righteousness, in remedy of which he prescribed "a conscious acceptance of Christian humility"²⁴; and the McCarthyite paranoia of the early 1950's, against which he called for maturity, responsibility, and "clear-headed analysis".²⁵

He continued in prophetic style even when under the pressures of being the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. In 1961, in a speech prepared for delivery at Amherst College and subsequently published in Harper's Magazine, he continued to point out to his hearers the movement of history, declaring that "men do not overcome their crises by running away from them backward. No cozy retreats from a challenging future can be looked for in an outgrown past."²⁶ He then recalled the histories of Sparta and Athens; the former was well-disciplined but satisfied with the structures she had evolved, the latter, in the Periclean era, was adventuresome and open to new ideas. And so, in the time Stevenson was recalling, Athens outwitted and defeated Sparta. The normal, patriotic American politician or high-school civics teacher would then have made the point that America, being free, is like Athens and that Russia, being under repressive discipline, is like Sparta; and so America is better

²⁴Call to Greatness, p. 97.

²⁵Ibid., p. 100.

²⁶Looking Outward, p. 239.

than Russia.²⁷ But not Stevenson. He drew out historic irony in his comparison:

Today, who is Sparta, who is Athens? Who has the initiative? Who is making the schemes? Who is bold and adventurous? Who is cautious and "reluctant to do even what is necessary"? Have free men become the conservatives and the Communists the adventurers and innovators? Can there be more to Krushchev's confidence that he will "bury us" than brash self-assertion? Has he captured a sense of history that we in the West have lost?²⁸

A model of this form of challenging of a nation's self-consciousness, of its conventional wisdom, is to be found in the Old Testament prophets; the locus classicus for this, at Isaiah 10:5, where the prophet, in the words "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my fury!", suggests that God is not on Israel's side of the impending war, but that His purposes are being carried out by the pagan power.

The prophetic idea that America's enemy in the cold war might just possibly represent some aspects of truth in the course of world history was a theme that Stevenson never abandoned. It appeared in the last commencement address he was to deliver, this time at Williams College. In that speech he went so far as to suggest that Marxism in some of its dimensions is "the last great outburst of the spirit of prophecy".²⁹ He continued, asserting that:

²⁷The author writes this not out of sheer hero-worship of Stevenson, but out of memory of some of his high-school teachers and of the rhetoric of Senator Everett Dirksen of Illinois.

²⁸Looking Outward. p. 243.

²⁹Stevenson, "Commencement - His Voice is Stilled," Williams Alumni Review. August 1965, p. 8.

Only in western civilization does this note ^{[of} prophecy[]] sound out of outrage at injustice, of compassion for misery. This note, like the voice of Jeremiah or Isaiah or Christ himself cannot be stilled. . . . We have no alibis today with which to face these ancient judgments. As we add in one year the entire national income of Africa to our wealth, as we pour out our \$50 billion on arms, as we shoot another \$5 billion of equipment towards the empty moon--here on earth the "sentence of the watchers" goes forth upon our society.

"I was hungry and ye fed me not."

"I was naked and you did not clothe me."

"I was homeless and you gave me not shelter."

These judgments do not change. Rather they acquire a new dimension because of the very dimensions of our good fortune. If we use this first great liberation of our resources only to be more comfortable, we can be sure that God is not mocked, and as we have sown indifference, so we shall reap destruction.³⁰

There can be no serious question that this kind of statement is prophetic in the sense that that term has been used here. There likewise can be no serious question that this sort of prophecy came out of the most serious kind of grappling with the meaning of the Biblical witness for the life of a modern nation, and that this grappling was not simply an intellectual one of translating Biblical metaphors to current realities, but rather was done with a commitment to the basic truth of the Biblical message. Here, then, is located the final flowering of Stevenson's faith.

Conclusions.

When Stevenson's explicit religious thought and expressions are examined closely, there appears a picture of some confusion, unsophistication, and inarticulateness. When

³⁰Ibid., pp. 9-10.

his political thought is analyzed, there emerge dominant themes which, offered in piety and humility, turn out to be in fact, fairly pious and humble in an intellectual sense. Even when he speaks of the Church and its function, Stevenson's thought, from a theologian's point of view, is fairly shallow. But all of this confusion, unsophistication, and shallowness fall away as Stevenson is observed in action as a statesman performing certain religious roles, as preacher, as priest, and, at his height, as prophet. His presentation in these roles is increasingly articulate and profound; his argument becomes extremely cogent and clear. The appellation "prophet" does not appear to be too generous in this context.

CHAPTER V: ADLAI EWING STEVENSON IN CONTEXT

It has been the purpose of this paper to analyze Stevenson's thought from a theological point of view. It has not been the purpose to trace the sources of that thought or to produce a biography of the thinker. Even more, it is outside the scope of this paper to describe the history of the era in which Stevenson acted or the history of the sort of thought he represents. Nevertheless, it is appropriate, while recognizing these limits, to make a few observations about Stevenson's broader contexts in order that there might be more perspective on what has been discovered about his thought and actions.

The Political Milieu of his Public Life.

Stevenson's public life spanned the administrations of five Presidents of the United States over a period of three decades. His career ranged from "bright young lawyer" in the New Deal, through Presidential candidate, to Ambassador to the United Nations. In all of this period, it would be fair to say that Stevenson never dominated the political atmosphere, although he contributed to that atmosphere in important ways beginning in 1952.

The appropriate time came in 1948, when he ran for Governor of Illinois and was elected. He inherited an administrative mess, the heritage of the war years and of corruption in Illinois Republican politics, and he did an impressive job of reform in his state. So impressive was his accomplishment that, against his stated desires, he was nominated for the Presidency by his Party in 1952. In the analysis of one school of American historians, the era of the 1950s was that of "an entirely predictable decade of Memory after two decades of active and exhausting Hope."² Stevenson, representing the "politics of hope", was fighting against the rhythm of American history. The people were entranced by their war hero and now President, Dwight D. Eisenhower; the political atmosphere was poisoned by the anti-communist and anti-intellectual reaction of McCarthyism. The time was not an auspicious one for a politician inclined to play the prophet, who wished, in the slogan of the 1952 Democratic campaign, to "talk sense to the American people".

By 1960, a new generation of politicians had come forward in American life, and Stevenson stood in their shadow. His former advisers, men like John Kenneth Galbraith, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Newton Minnow, Willard Wirtz, Arthur Goldberg, and George Ball, became advisers to the new leader, John F. Kennedy. The new leader was a man of vigor; the politics of hope were coming back again; and the political mode of prophetism was again beginning to be accepted. Stevenson accepted the post of cabinet officer and Ambassador to the United Nations

²A.M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Politics of Hope (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. x.

in the new administration, and his own closest advisers of former years became officers of the government and close advisers of the new President. Symbolically, at least, Stevenson had kept alive the politics of Hope during the dry years of the 1950s, and he thus provided a link between the Roosevelt-Truman years and the Kennedy years.

But Stevenson was unlike the Presidents between whose leadership he "kept the faith". He had no one playing Louis Howe to his Roosevelt, urging him on and telling him, as the playwright in Sunrise at Campobello has Howe tell Roosevelt, that he was divinely elected to lead his nation. Further, Stevenson had none of the "give-'em-hell" cock-sureness and surface decisiveness of Harry S. Truman. And he lacked the cool, pragmatic political precision of the Kennedy presidential operation. He was thoroughly a transitional figure, participating fully in neither end of the continuum in which he worked.

The Eisenhower years were years not only of the politics of Memory; they were also a time of extreme moralism in the conduct of public policy. That is to say, issues were articulated by the nation's elected leaders primarily in black and white terms. In domestic affairs, the choice was between socialism and free enterprise; in international affairs, the only choice was between totalitarian communism and the democratic free world. America was said to be on the side of free enterprise, the democratic free world, and God. It is against this sort of background, in this milieu, that Stevenson's

ability to see and to articulate shades of ideological gray between the extremes takes on significance. A judgment that the issues of history require on America's part "a conscious acceptance of Christian humility--a recognition that we are never going to solve many of the hard problems of the world, but will simply have to learn to live with them, for years and maybe centuries,"³ takes on a special sting as seen over against the simple optimistic moralism of the Eisenhower years. The clarity and consistency of Stevenson's vision in such matters is demonstrated by his continued articulation and elaboration of that vision even when the political climate had changed in the direction favorable to his interests, in the 1960s.

The Family Milieu.

Stevenson's family tradition was one of public service, reaching far back into the colonial beginnings of America.⁴ He was exposed to politics early, attending his first political convention at the age of nine when his grandfather was nominated for the Vice-Presidency as the running mate of William Jennings Bryan in his last campaign for the Presidency. At the age of twelve, Stevenson met Governor Woodrow Wilson of New Jersey, then candidate for President. His grandfather

³Call to Greatness, p. 97.

⁴N.F. Busch, Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois, pp. 32 ff. contains an excellent treatment of this family tradition and is well worth reading in this connection, as is also Chapter 2, "History as a Family Matter", in K.S. Davis, A Prophet in His Own Country.

had been Vice-President under Grover Cleveland. His great-grandfather Jesse Fell had been one of the men instrumental in persuading Abraham Lincoln to run for President in 1860. Although all of this cannot be said to have determined Stevenson's life of public service, it certainly made it perfectly natural that he should eventually mature in that direction. And so he did.

The family's background was rather self-consciously liberal, as Stevenson perceived it. He wrote that his mother's "grandfather, Jesse Fell, was a 'liberal' of those days, I suppose, an abolitionist, educator and a founder of the Unitarian Church in Bloomington. . . . His son-in-law, my grandfather William Osborn Davis, was also a Pennsylvania Quaker who found the Unitarian Church in Bloomington much to his liking. For forty years he was a leading Republican editor and publisher of Illinois."⁵ Stevenson's liberalism, both in religion and in politics, had deep roots of which he was very conscious. Add to these deep roots the belabored religious teaching which his mother was prone to offer, and it can be seen that the family milieu, while again not necessarily determining Stevenson's liberalism, certainly made his growth in that direction an expected and natural development.

The religious life of the Stevenson family as he was growing up centered on the Unitarian Church of Bloomington. The author is a stranger to the life of that church, and so

⁵Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, pp. xv-xvi.

he is dependent upon the judgment of others as to the possible influences of that environment. Dr. James Luther Adams, Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, formerly a Unitarian pastor in Illinois, a man of Stevenson's generation and at one time a close friend of Stevenson's feels that:

especially in the Middle West, and in New England, Unitarianism has a pretty strong tradition of civic responsibility and social idealism requiring some courage. . . . Especially in twentieth century Unitarianism in the Middle West . . . , there is a vigorous effort to be honest with regard to the traditional formulations. There is emphasis on the prophets and in seeing Jesus in that line--more moralistic than theological or Christological. [And there is emphasis upon] intellectual integrity as against the Church and its formulations--even the Unitarian Church . . . , an obligation to fight the Church for the sake of the Church.⁶

If this be an accurate report of the emphases of Middle West American Unitarianism, and there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the report, the evidence of Stevenson's speeches and papers is that his thinking is totally in line with these emphases. His "intellectual integrity as against the Church" was demonstrated in his rejection of "competitive indoctrination" and of the "faith swallowed whole, like a pill". His "emphasis on the prophets and in seeing Jesus in that line" has already been made clear in Chapter IV; it may be added here that almost all his Biblical quotations and allusions, except to passages in the Psalms, are to prophetic texts, and his fairly rare references to Jesus are

⁶Interview with James Luther Adams, February 4, 1966.

almost all in a generally "prophetic" context. So also in this area of Stevenson's family milieu, his flowering represents the development of elements that were there from the beginning.

The Hero, Lincoln.

The family connection with Lincoln's political career was a matter of some significance with Stevenson, and on numerous occasions he confessed that Lincoln was his hero in American history. In 1959 The Observer of London published an article by Stevenson entitled "Lincoln's Faith"⁷; that article, which develops the theme that Lincoln's greatness was in his faith in democracy and his vision of "America as the trustee for humanity"⁸, concludes with what might be taken as Stevenson's confession of loyalty to Lincoln and his faith: "And so, while statesmen come and statesmen go, Lincoln in his person and in his life work remains the greatest democrat of us all, and a continuing inspiration to all mankind."⁹

An interesting detail on Stevenson's relationship to Lincoln occurred in 1952, immediately after the Democratic convention that had nominated him for the Presidency. After Stevenson had returned to the Governor's Mansion in Springfield, he went one night to the house which Lincoln had lived in when he was in Springfield. He gained entrance into the

⁷Now published as the last chapter of Putting First Things First, pp. 112-115.

⁸Ibid., p. 114.

⁹Ibid., p. 115.

house, which the State of Illinois maintains as a historical monument, and sat for an hour in Lincoln's rocking chair, meditating. This brief retreat to the shrine of his hero was in no way done for publicity or effect; for sometime, only Stevenson, a close friend, and the caretaker of the Lincoln house knew about the incident. Stevenson was asked about the whole affair in an interview, and he reported that he went to Lincoln's house because "I just was overwhelmed" and he wanted to think about the tasks ahead of him. The Lincoln house was an appropriate place for this, for "who had suffered more acute mental anguish than Abraham Lincoln? . . . And it was a great comfort . . . to reflect on the miseries of that man's life, to reflect on the difficulties he met and overcame. . . . [The experience] perhaps opened hidden sources I didn't know I had."¹⁰ Reflection on Lincoln's sufferings and how he met them was, then, a source of spiritual strength for Stevenson.

It is not therefore very surprising that general features of Stevenson's religion coincide with features of Lincoln's religion.¹¹ Lincoln had no clear connection with a particular denomination; Stevenson held full membership in two doctrinally opposed denominations at once. Lincoln was less interested in formal theology than in faithfulness to the

¹⁰Portrait of Adlai Stevenson. . . (Produced by Arnold Michaelis; Spoken Arts 770), side 2.

¹¹The author's source for Lincoln's religion is W.J. Wolf, The Religion of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), passim.

main witness of Bible concerning human behavior; Stevenson's attitude was the same. Lincoln is found, upon close analysis, to stand very much in the tradition of the Biblical prophets; this study has argued a similar thing for Stevenson.

In the case, then, of Stevenson's major political and historical hero, the conclusions are much the same as in the case of family milieu: his mature thought and expression are quite congruent with those of the man after whom he quite consciously modelled himself.

Stevenson and Rationalism.

It is not very easy to place Stevenson more accurately than has already been done. Families such as his own are fairly rare in American history; most of the present "Establishment" rank families have more shallow roots in time as families of influence than did Stevenson's family. Further, the hero Lincoln stands as something of a sport in American history; he was unique in every respect, as is fitting in the case of one who can be soberly judged as "'a biblical prophet' who saw himself as 'an instrument of God' and his country as God's 'almost chosen people' called to world responsibility."¹²

¹²Ibid., p. 194. Stevenson also shared with Lincoln the idea of democracy as a religion, as, according to one analysis of the latter's Gettysburg Address, "Democracy was to Lincoln a religion, and he wanted it to be in a real sense the religion of his audience." (R.P. Basler, Abraham Lincoln, His Speeches and Writings (1946), p. 42, quoted in Wolf, op. cit., p. 170.)

One biographer places Stevenson spiritually in the Enlightenment, saying:

Stevenson's urbane temper, his wit, his courtesy were in the style of the eighteenth century, as were his rationalist and Deist beliefs and his emphasis on striving for perfection in society. There was even an eighteenth-century look to his face, which would not have seemed out of place under a wig.¹³

This summary of Stevenson is certainly a cogent one and quite attractive. Surely there is strong evidence to back up this impression, not the least being Stevenson's use of William James' doctrine of ultimate triumph of reason as the theme of his introduction to Major Campaign Speeches, 1952.¹⁴ and his heavy use of citations from thinkers of the eighteenth century.¹⁵ Yet there are countervailing judgments on Stevenson's thought, such as Dr. James Luther Adams statement that "I wouldn't put him down as an enlightenment liberal who thinks everything will be put under control by rational procedures."¹⁶

Adams' judgment appears to be more sensitive than biographer Whitman's. Stevenson's urbane temper was as much in the style of a Harvard Law School product as it was "in the style of the eighteenth century"; his wit he once said he modelled specifically on that of Abraham Lincoln,¹⁷ and there are enough uses of quips that Stevenson actually

¹³A. Whitman and The New York Times, Portrait: Adlai E. Stevenson. . . . p. viii.

¹⁴Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, pp. x-xxxi.

¹⁵See Chapter III, note 39. (above, p. 60).

¹⁶Interview with Adams, February 4, 1966.

¹⁷Portrait of Adlai Stevenson. . . (Spoken Arts 770), side 2.

attributed to Lincoln to demonstrate this modeling; his courtesy was nothing less than was expected from him from the beginning by a rather aristocratic family.¹⁸ It is much too simple to say that Stevenson's were "rationalist and Deist beliefs" and that his emphasis was "on striving for perfection in society". The evidence of the preceding chapters is that there were elements of meditation, of the awareness of mystery, of dependence on God as "transcendent power", of prayer, of prophecy, of recognition of the existence of intractable problems in human history. All of this is at some remove from the rationalism and Deism to be found in American history.

There are some respects in which Stevenson resembled the American "founding fathers" in his religion, holding in mind the reservations concerning "rationalism and Deism". Like Washington, he was non-committal on many fine parts of doctrine, although he held formal church membership. Stevenson's view of the role of the church even seems to echo Washington's view "that Religion and Morality are the essential pillars of civil society".¹⁹ Like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, Stevenson combined philosophical interests and politics, but he did not have the classical learning of these men, which included knowledge and use of Greek, nor

¹⁸Cf. E.S. Ives and H. Dolson, My Brother Adlai, passim.

¹⁹George Washington, Letter of March 3, 1797 (Papers of George Washington, Library of Congress, CCCXXXVI, 280-81), quoted in P.F. Boller, Jr., George Washington and Religion (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), pp. 193-94.

their philosophical sophistication. Nor, it should be added, did these men have Stevenson's sensitivity to the prophetic element in religion, as is evidenced by Jefferson's condensation of the Gospels in which Jesus is reduced to a teacher of personal morality. Stevenson seems to have been fascinated by the achievements of these men, and to have loved their phrases and many of their ideas. But there is no suggestion in his thought and writings or in the story of his life that he ever tried to enter into thought of the founding fathers in the profound way that he did with Lincoln.

Conclusions.

The sources of Stevenson's thought seem to be deep in his family history, with Lincoln being considered, by Jesse Fell's connection with him, a central figure of that history. If there is a "tradition" in American history that Stevenson represents, it might best be called the "prophetic tradition", for, although he shares something with many streams of American thought--rationalism, deism, civil libertarianism, pragmatism, humanism, federalism, liberalism--none of these traditions were central to him. In this sense he was both eclectic and inconsistent, and there is indication that this eclecticism and inconsistency was at least in part consciously derived from Stevenson's understanding of the meaning of America's founding fathers. He writes of the achievement

of these men in this way:

. . . America's greatest contribution to human society has not been material, but rather the originality and diversity of her ideas--the moral sentiments of human liberty and human welfare written into the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights by the grand non-conformists.²⁰

It also seems clear that Stevenson drew in a straightforward way upon his religion and upon Biblical language to express many of his ideas. He saw Christianity as the cornerstone of democracy and of his kind of liberalism, and he read that vision back into the American tradition. So, in the same article in which he discussed the American contribution of originality, diversity, and conformism, he also asserted that "'In God We Trust' is not just a slogan stamped on our media of material exchange, but the great affirmation of faith that has wrought the miracle of America."²¹ The founding fathers might have found no offense in such a statement as that, although that is doubtful. They certainly would not have gone the further, Lincolnesque step that Stevenson went, to declare that

God has set for us an awesome mission: nothing less than the leadership of the free world. Because He asks nothing of His servants beyond their strength, He has given to us vast power and vast opportunity. And like that servant of Biblical times who received the talents, we shall be held to strict account for what we do with them.²²

²⁰What I Think, p. 208.

²¹Ibid., p. 209.

²²Major Campaign Speeches, 1952, p. 262.

This last is not a statement which the truly rationalist, deist founding fathers could have made. It is precisely the sort of statement Lincoln could and did make.²³

Stevenson's role, then, was a transitional one in the politics of his time, and in this transitional role his dominant public religious characteristic was a prophetic one. His growth into this situation was a natural, straightforward growth, centering on his interpretation of his family's history and religion, focusing on his hero, Abraham Lincoln.

²³See above, page 89.

CONCLUSION: A STATESMAN ANSWERS A CHURCHMAN

This study has been an attempt to find the theological "mainspring" of the thought of Adlai Ewing Stevenson in an approach to saying something about the relationship of the faith to matters of State. What the author is now prepared to say on the basis of this long journey through Stevenson's thought is really very modest.

A preliminary statement has to do with what might be called Stevenson's "status as a Christian". There is nothing in particular in his writings that would compel one to classify Stevenson as a Christian on the basis of affirmation of orthodox doctrine. There is no sustained, explicit theological doctrine of God, sin, man, redemption, church, or sacraments to be gleaned from Stevenson. A Jew, Muslim, or deist could as well have said the things Stevenson said as a Christian could. Yet, without being overeager to claim Stevenson for the Church, it must be said that Stevenson was a Christian, for, as one Biblical theologian has put it:

central . . . to the Church's life is no set of principles, no ideology, in terms of which this or that element in her heritage or practice . . . must be justified (or perhaps found wanting). To be a Christian is to participate in an existing, concrete, historical community defined not in abstract ideas (or ideals), but in terms of past, present, and future experience. It does not primarily involve one's

personal values or convictions or piety or philosophy, though it will be without integrity if there is pretense that one has altogether transcended such considerations. It does not primarily involve agreement with one's fellow Christians on some definitive statement of the Christian faith, though the integrity of the community obviously demands continual, communal wrestling with the nature of the faith. It does involve a shared heritage and an affirmation about that shared heritage.¹

Stevenson was a loyal worshipper in Church, involved in appropriating for himself and affirming the Christian heritage as it was handed on to him both in the Unitarian Church and in the Presbyterian Church. There is no need to strain further over that issue.

A second consideration is whether or not Stevenson's explicit statements about the relation of the Church to society should receive particular honor. It is the author's opinion that, for the most part, they should not. The Church, from a theological point of view at the least and, hopefully, in actual practice, is much more than a "national resource" or a source of morality and thus a pillar of society. It is a community which shares and passes on a heritage, and which also represents to its members, and to others who observe it, that to which men are called to be. In its rehearsal and celebration of God's dealings with men in times past, the Church sharpens men's perception for what God is doing now, and it provides a context for participation

¹H.H. Guthrie, Jr., Israel's Sacred Songs . . .
(New York: Seabury Press, 1966), p. 199.

in these doings. For such reasons, the author cannot accept Stevenson's basic explicit views on the function of the Church.

But Stevenson as a statesman acted out another view of the function of the Church, and this latter view is one which the author can whole-heartedly embrace. Stevenson attempted to hold before those who would listen to him the realities of the world as he perceived them, this perception being informed by a profound reading of the Bible and a rather straightforward application of the Biblical message. This straightforwardness, this simplicity, was his theological mainspring. Here is an answer from Stevenson to the author's question, for in the seminaries and libraries of theology, there is elaborate straining over the ways and means of translating the insights of the faith into terms that have some leverage in the modern world. Stevenson's response seems to be, "relax, stand back, tell your message, and trust people to understand it." Stevenson's performance as a prophet demonstrates that great theological sophistication is somewhat beside the point when dealing with "secular" realities. Or, to put the lesson in another way, the effectiveness of the "ministry of the laity" is not dependent upon theological articulateness.

It seems that Stevenson, by his own theologically unsophisticated route, arrived at a "secular meaning of the Gospel",² a translation of the language of theology from

²Pace P. Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1963).

metaphysics to politics,³ pronouncing the centrality of freedom, human values, faith, and responsibility in advance of the current concern for these matters on the part of the "new theologians" of the 1960s. One of the implications of this is to point up the cultural lag from which theology seems chronically to suffer. A corollary to this is that the Church, as the "new theologians" are saying, needs to watch more carefully and listen more intently to developments outside the traditional cloisters.

The author makes no claim to profundity in all of these conclusions; indeed, more than anything else, they indicate that he has not fully understood the question which he set out to answer or the thought of the man to whom he turned for some illumination. It is perhaps wisest, therefore, at this point to let stand the thought of Stevenson, and to live with it and the problems of relating the faith to matters of State--as Stevenson would say, "in accents of humility".

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³Pace H. Cox, The Secular City.

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